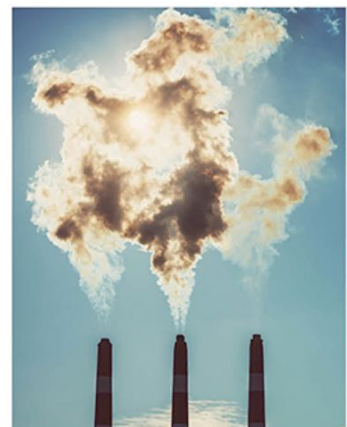
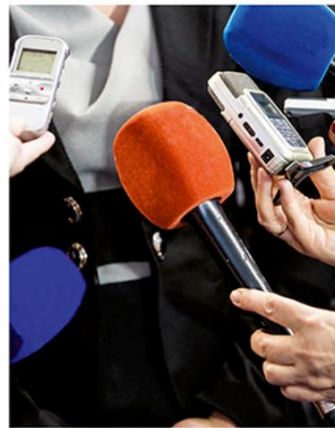


OXFORD

introduction to  
**INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS**  
theories and approaches

*eighth edition*



GEORG SØRENSEN | JØRGEN MØLLER | ROBERT JACKSON

# Introduction to International Relations



introduction to

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

theories and approaches

*eighth edition*

GEORG SØRENSEN | JØRGEN MØLLER | ROBERT JACKSON

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Seventh edition 2019

Impression: 1

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*In memory of Robert Jackson*



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This eighth edition has benefitted from helpful comments made by the readers of the first seven editions as well as a careful review process and input from a number of new readers. We were encouraged to stay with the basic aim and format of the book: a succinct and readable introduction to the major IR theories and approaches. However, we were also encouraged to put more emphasis on the relevance of these theories for real world developments. We have therefore altered the structure of this eighth edition. The book now comes in three parts: (1) Studying IR; (2) Major IR Theories and Approaches; (3) Theory Meets the Real World: Policy and Issues.

These are turbulent times, and as part of our attempt to make theories speak more directly to real world developments, we have followed suggestions to further review and discuss some of the key challenges that face the global community. A new Chapter 12 uses IR theories to shed light on the state of the present world order. How stable is it and to what extent does it live up to expectations about securing progress for states as well as for individuals? Second, we have included a substantial section on climate change as part of 'major issues in IR' in Chapter 11. This section describes the present challenges related to climate change and asks what the consequences are for international relations, and to what extent existing IR theories can help us make sense of these challenges. Third, we have expanded the engagement with a number of more recent theoretical perspectives, including feminist theories and theories from the Global South.

All chapters have been brought up to date in the light of current international events and ongoing debates in the discipline. Questions linking theory to practice are included at the end of each chapter. The supporting website has been revised and expanded. A revised glossary with key terms is included at the end of the book.

We are grateful for support from a large number of people. For this edition, we thank Will Bain, Michael Corgan, Olaf Corry, Tonny Brems Knudsen, Morten Valbjørn and Anders Wivel for advice and inspiration. Sarah Iles was a great help as commissioning editor for this eighth edition. Assistant editors Katie Staal and Anna Galasinska kept us on our toes and were always ready with support and encouragement. Special thanks to Anna for a very careful reading of the manuscript and many helpful suggestions for improvements. Annette Andersen again handled the paperwork with her usual efficiency and punctuality. Birgit Enevoldsen and Gustav Olsen Dyppel suggested new figures, revised tables, and helped revise various elements of the book's online resources with Oxford University Press. We owe special thanks to those readers who provided us with useful comments on the seventh edition, including ten anonymous referees. We have tried to deal with their many excellent suggestions for improvement without sacrificing the aims and qualities of previous editions on which most of them commented very favourably. We are confident that both instructors and students will find that this eighth edition has managed to achieve that goal.

We are grateful once again to our families for their support in our continuing endeavour to produce an IR textbook that can communicate to readers not only in North America and



Europe but everywhere that international relations is taught and studied as an academic discipline. Our greatest debt is to Robert Jackson, without whom this book could not have been written. Robert passed away during the work on this eighth edition, but his elegant writing style and sharp analytical mind are reflected on almost every page of the text. We can only hope that we have been able to live up to the high standards set by his work.

*Georg Sørensen and Jørgen Møller, Aarhus,  
January 2021*

## NEW TO THIS EDITION

- The book has been restructured. It now contains an extended Part 3 called Theory Meets the Real World: Policy and Issues, with four chapters. A chapter on Foreign Policy is followed by chapters on Major Issues in IPE and Major Issues in IR, respectively.
- The final chapter in Part 3 (Chapter 12) is a new addition to the book. It asks the big question about the current state of world order, and discusses to what extent and in what ways the different theories introduced in the book help us understand where the world is going.
- Substantial revisions have been made to all chapters. Particularly important revisions have been made to the chapters on Liberalism, Post-positivist approaches, Foreign Policy, Major Issues in IPE, and Major Issues in IR.
- Chapter 11 now includes an extended discussion of the challenges presented by climate change and how far different IR theories take us in understanding these new challenges. We also introduce the 'Green Theory' approaches.
- All chapters have been brought up to date in the light of current events and ongoing debates in the discipline. The book contains a large number of new text boxes and figures.



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## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Today, virtually the entire population of the world lives within the borders of those separate territorial communities we call states—well over seven billion people are citizens or subjects of one state or another. For more than half a billion people living in the developed countries of Western Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, basic security and welfare are often taken more or less for granted, because it is guaranteed and sometimes directly provided by the state. But for several billions of people who live in the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and the former Soviet Union, basic security and welfare are not something that can be taken for granted. Protection, policing, law enforcement, and other civil conditions of minimal safety for all cannot be guaranteed. For many people, it is a daily challenge to provide adequate food, clean water, housing, and similar socioeconomic necessities. The academic subject of international relations (IR) revolves around the interactions between actors in the international system, including most prominently states. It seeks to understand how the interplay between international factors and domestic conditions shapes these interactions. Only in this way can we understand how people are provided, or not provided, with the basic values of security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare.

### What Is in the Book?

First and foremost, this book is an introduction to the academic discipline of IR. What is a ‘discipline’? It is a branch of knowledge, aimed at the systematic understanding of a subject. As is often the case in the social sciences, in IR there is no one best way to master the subject. Instead, what we have are several significant theories and theoretical approaches or even just schools of thought: Realism, Liberalism, International Society, Social Constructivism, International Political Economy, and what we with an umbrella term call Post-positivist approaches. They interact and overlap in interesting and important ways that we investigate in the chapters that follow. However, each one explores the subject of IR in its own distinctive way. Realism, for example, is focused on the basic value of security, because according to realists war is always a possibility in a system of sovereign states. Liberals, on the other hand, argue that international relations can be cooperative and not merely conflictive. That belief is based on the idea that the modern, liberal state can bring progress and opportunities to the greatest number of people around the world.

All the most important theories and theoretical traditions of IR are presented in the chapters that follow, and the book also carefully discusses what these theories have to say about some of the major issues of contemporary global politics. There is no need to give a detailed account of each chapter here. But a brief consumer guide may be helpful. What is it that this book has to offer? The main elements can be summarized as follows:

- This eighth edition provides an introduction to the analytical tools that the discipline has on its shelves: IR theories and approaches. They are Realism, Liberalism, International Society, theories of International Political Economy (IPE), Social Constructivism, and the Post-positivist approaches (Post-structuralism, Postcolonialism, Feminism) that have gained prominence in recent years (Green theory is introduced in Chapter 11 as part of the issue on Climate Change). A separate chapter presents theories involved in foreign policy analysis.
- Theories are presented faithfully, by focusing on both their strengths and their weaknesses. Our vantage point is a pluralist recognition that, to this day, there is no clear set of criteria for science that can be imported by IR scholars. Different theories and approaches anchored in different views of what constitutes science therefore have analytical value for students of IR—though some theories and approaches are of course likely to be more theoretically important or have greater empirical value than others, depending on the problem that a student seeks to solve. The main points of contention between theories are thoroughly discussed. The book makes clear how major theoretical debates link up with each other and structure the discipline of IR.
- The book places emphasis on the relationship between ‘IR theory’ (academic knowledge of international relations) and ‘IR practice’ (real-world events and activities of world politics). The third part of the book is devoted entirely to this theme. Chapters on foreign policy, major issues in IPE and IR and a chapter on ‘world order or world chaos?’ discuss important aspects of the theory/practice interplay. Theories matter for their own sake, and theories also matter as a guide to practice. The book carefully explains how particular theories organize and sharpen our view of the world. We often assume that the sword is mightier than the pen, but—as Lord Keynes famously recognized when pointing out that practical men are usually the slaves of some defunct intellectual—it is the pen, our guiding ideas and assumptions which usually shape the ways that swords are put to use.

## Learning Aids

To facilitate a rapid entry into the discipline of IR, the chapters have the following features:

- Summary: each chapter begins with a brief summary of the main points.
- Key Points: each chapter ends with a list of the key points brought forward in the chapter.
- Questions: each chapter provides a number of study questions that can be used for discussions or as topics for essays.
- Guide to Further Reading: each chapter provides a brief guide to further reading on the subject of the chapter.
- Glossary: key terms are highlighted in bold throughout the text and then presented in the Glossary at the end of the book.

- The companion website contains case-studies organized by chapters, additional study questions, videos, and web links that include links to specific countries/regions and to essential international organizations. It can be found at: [www.oup.com/he/sorensen-moller8e](http://www.oup.com/he/sorensen-moller8e).

Every chapter is guided by our aim to enable students to acquire knowledge of IR as an evolving academic discipline. Although we have written the book with introductory-level courses foremost in mind, it also contains much information and analysis that will prove valuable in higher-level courses, making it possible for students to advance more swiftly in their study of IR.

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

## Chapter Summaries

Identify the scope of the material to be covered, and what themes and issues you can expect to learn about, with Chapter Summaries at the beginning of each chapter.

**Summary**

This chapter sets forth the liberal tradition in IR. Basic liberal assumptions are: (1) a positive view of human nature; (2) a conviction that international relations can be managed rather than conflictual; and (3) a belief in progress. In their conceptions of international cooperation, liberal theorists emphasize different features of world politics. Classical liberals highlight transnational non-governmental ties between societies, and institutional liberals highlight transnational non-governmental ties between societies, and communication between individuals and between groups. Interdependence liberals highlight attention to economic ties of mutual exchange and mutual dependence between peoples and governments. Institutional liberals underscore the importance of cooperation between states; finally, republican liberals argue that liberal democratic institutions and forms of government are of vital importance for inducing cooperative relations between states. The chapter discusses these four schools of thought.

### BOX 5.3 Key Concepts: International system, international society

A system of states (or international system) is formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another's behavior to make the behaviour of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other. A society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they consider themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another and share in the working of common institutions.

**Bull (1995: 9–13)**

## Key Concepts

Deepen your understanding with discussions of Key Concepts.

### BOX 5.10 Key Developments: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011) on Libya

Determining that the situation in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya continues to constitute a threat to international peace and security, Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations,

1. Demands the immediate establishment of a ceasefire and a complete end to violent attacks against, and abuses of, civilians;
2. Stresses the need to intensify efforts to find a solution to the crisis which respects the legitimate demands of the Libyan people;
3. Demands that the Libyan authorities comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law and take all necessary steps to protect civilians and meet their basic needs, and to ensure the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian assistance.

## Key Developments

Contextualize your knowledge with information on Key Developments in International Relations.

### BOX 4.2 Key Arguments: The importance of individuals in global politics

Citizens have become important variables . . . in global politics . . . [for] a number of reasons:

1. The erosion and dispersion of state and governmental power.
2. The advent of global television, the widening use of computers in the workplace, the growth of foreign travel and the mushrooming migrations of peoples, the spread of educational institutions . . . [have] enhanced the analytic skills of individuals.
3. The crowding onto the global agenda of new, interdependence issues (such as environmental pollution, currency crises, the drug trade, AIDS, and terrorism) has made more salient the processes whereby global dynamics affect the welfare and pocketbooks of individuals.
4. The revolution of information technologies has made it possible for citizens and states to literally to 'see' the aggregation of micro actions into macro outcomes. People can now see the consequences of their actions in real time.

## Key Arguments

Identify controversies, debates, and arguments, and challenge your preconceptions, with Key Arguments boxes, which draw out specific arguments for your consideration.

### BOX 5.4 Key Quotes: President Gorbachev on Soviet-US collaboration (1985)

You asked me what is the primary thing that defines Soviet-American relations. It is the immutable fact that whether we like one another or not, we can either live or perish only together. The principal question that must be answered is whether we are at last ready to recognize that there is another way to live at peace with each other, whether we are prepared to switch our mentality and our mode of acting from a confrontational to a peaceful track.

**Quoted from Kissinger (1994: 790)**

## Key Quotes

Gain insight into the subject area with important and relevant Key Quotes from renowned scholars.

## Key Thinkers

Put your learning into context with information about Key Thinkers in the discipline of International Relations.

### BOX 5.1 Key Thinkers: A short history of the International Society approach

The International Society approach draws on the work of political theorists such as Grotius and Emer de Vattel and the historian Arnold Heeren. It owes much to the School of Economics (LSE) Professor Charles Manning's interwar work on international society. Its main institutional home has been the so-called British Committee for the Theory of International Politics, which was formed in 1958 and which aimed to bring together academics from fields such as History, Philosophy, Theology, and International Law together with practitioners, mainly diplomats. The committee can be seen as a generation of International Society scholars. It was chaired, in succession, by Hans Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, the diplomat Adam Watson, and the philosopher Hedley Bull. It was dissolved in the 1980s, at about the time the International Society approach was being developed.

### ★ Key points

- The theoretical point of departure for liberalism is the individual. Individuals and collectivities of individuals are the focus of analysis; first and foremost nations, corporations, organizations, and associations of all kinds. Liberals maintain that conflict but also cooperation can shape international affairs.
- Liberals are basically optimistic: when humans employ their reason they can achieve mutually beneficial cooperation. They can put an end to war. Liberal optimism is connected with the rise of the modern state. Modernization means progress for human life, including international relations.
- Liberal arguments for more cooperative international relations are divided into four strands: sociological liberalism, interdependence liberalism, institutional liberalism, and republican liberalism.

## Key Points

Consolidate your knowledge at the end of each chapter with Key Points, which summarize the most important ideas and arguments discussed.

## Questions

Review your knowledge of core themes and develop your analytical and reflective skills with critical end-of-chapter questions.

### ? Questions

- Liberals are optimistic about human progress, cooperation, and peace. What reasons are given for that optimism? Are they good reasons?
- Has international history been as progressive as liberals claim? Use evidence to support your answer.
- Identify the arguments given by the four strands of liberalism discussed in the text. Which strand of liberalism do you think is more fundamentally important, or are all strands equally important?
- Some liberal theories only operate at the level of the international system, while others operate at the domestic level. What are the pros and cons of each of these strands of liberalism?
- What arguments can you make, for and against, the assertion that liberalism has made striking progress in the world during the past decades?

### ■ Guide to further reading

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- Evans, G. (2008). *The Responsibility to Protect*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Foot, R. and Walter, A. (2010). *China, the United States, and Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## Guide to further reading

Find out more about the issues raised, and locate the key academic literature in the field, with guided further reading lists.

## GLOSSARY

**anarchical society** A term used by Hedley Bull to describe the worldwide order of independent states who share common interests and values, and subject themselves to a common set of rules and institutions in dealing with each other. The concept of 'anarchical society' combines the realist claim that no world 'government' rules over sovereign states, with liberalism's emphasis on the common concerns, values, rules, institutions, and organizations of the international system.

**Anthropocene** An increasingly influential naming of a geological period where humans have had a significant, and often negative, impact on the environment.

**organizational approach** A sociological approach to foreign policy that focuses primarily on the organizational context in which decision-making takes place. The 'bureaucratic' approach is seen by some as distinct from other approaches by virtue of its emphasis on the relationship between decision-making and organizational structure. This approach, therefore, focuses on the context over the inherent rationality of decision; it seeks to clarify the context of individual foreign policies, but does not have a normative, prescriptive component.

## Glossary

Look up and revise key terms, which appear in colour throughout the text, and are defined in a glossary at the end of the book.



## HOW TO USE THE ONLINE RESOURCES

**Case studies:** Reinforce your understanding of chapter themes and learn to apply theory to practice with a range of case studies and accompanying assignments.

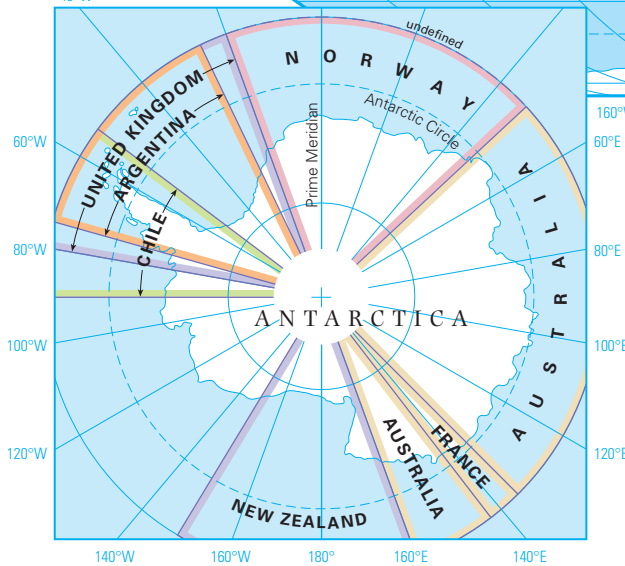
**Review questions:** Test yourself and revise for exams with additional review questions.

**Web links:** Broaden your learning with a series of annotated web links, organized by chapter, which point you to a wealth of relevant and reliable information.

**Flashcard glossary:** Revise key terms and concepts from the text with a digital flashcard glossary.

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—	international boundary
- - -	disputed boundary
AR	ARMENIA
AZ	AZERBAIJAN
BANG	BANGLADESH
BE	BENIN
BR	BRUNEI
BU	BURKINA
BUR	BURUNDI
CAR	CENTRAL AFRICAN
	REPUBLIC



G	THE GAMBIA
G-B	GUINEA-BISSAU
IS	ISRAEL
L	LEBANON
Q	QATAR
R	RWANDA
T	TAJIKISTAN
TU	TURKMENISTAN
U	UGANDA
UAE	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
ZIM	ZIMBABWE



*Note: In February 2019, FYRO Macedonia changed its name to the Republic of North Macedonia.*



# PART 1

# Studying IR

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# CHAPTER 1

## Why Study IR?

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### Summary

This chapter answers the question ‘why study IR?’ It begins by introducing the historical and social basis of international relations, or IR. The aim of the chapter is to emphasize the practical reality of international relations in our everyday lives and to connect that practical reality with the academic study of international relations. The chapter makes that connection by focusing on the core historical subject matter of IR: modern sovereign states and the international relations of the state system. Why do states and the state system exist? Three main topics are discussed: the significance of international relations in everyday life and the main values that states exist to foster; the historical evolution of the state system and world economy in brief outline; and the changing contemporary world of states.



## 1.1 International Relations in Everyday Life

**IR** is the shorthand name for the academic subject of international relations. It can be defined as the study of relationships and interactions between countries, including the activities and policies of national governments, international organizations (IOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and multinational corporations (MNCs). It can be both a theoretical subject and a practical or policy subject, and academic approaches to it can be either empirical or normative or both. It is often considered a branch of political science, but it is also a subject studied by historians (international or diplomatic history), and economists (international economics). It is also a field of legal studies (public international law) and an area of philosophy (international ethics). From that broader perspective, IR clearly is an interdisciplinary inquiry. Aspects of international relations, and in particular war and diplomacy, have been scrutinized and remarked upon at least since the time of the ancient Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu and the ancient Greek historian Thucydides, but IR only became a proper academic discipline in the early twentieth century.

The main reason why we should study IR is the fact that the entire population of the world is divided into separate political communities or independent countries, nation-states, which profoundly affect the way people think and live. Nation-states are involved with us, and we are involved with them. In highly successful nation-states, most of the population identify, often quite strongly, with the country of which they are citizens. They are proud of their country's flag. They sing the national anthem. They do not sing the anthems of other countries. They see the world's population as divided and organized in terms of separate nation-states. 'I'm American, you're French, he's German, she's Japanese, the man over there is from Brazil, the woman is from South Africa, the other fellow is Russian . . . ' And so it goes right around the world.

As a practical matter it is difficult and probably impossible for most people to escape from the various effects of nation-states on their daily lives, even if they wanted to. The state is involved in protecting them and providing for their security, both personal and national, in promoting their economic prosperity and social welfare, in taxing them, in educating them, in licensing and regulating them, in keeping them healthy, in building and maintaining public infrastructure (roads, bridges, harbours, airports, etc.), and much else besides. That involvement of people and states is often taken entirely for granted. But the relationship is profound. People's lives are shaped, very significantly, by that reality.

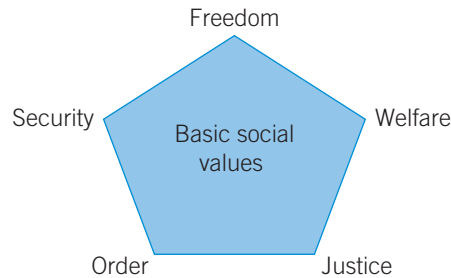
IR focuses on the various activities of nation-states in their external relations. To pave the way for this, some basic concepts are required. An independent nation or **state** may be defined as a bordered territory, with a permanent population, under the jurisdiction of a supreme government that is constitutionally separate—i.e., independent—from all foreign governments: a **sovereign state**. Together, those states form an international state system that is global in extent. At the present time, there are almost 200 independent states (see Figure 1.4). With very few isolated exceptions, everybody on Earth not only lives in one of those countries but is also a citizen of one of them and very rarely of more than one, although that possibility is increasing as the world becomes ever more

interdependent. So virtually every man, woman, and child on Earth is connected to a particular state, and via that state to the state system which affects their lives in important and even profound ways, including some of which they may not be fully aware of.

States are independent of each other, at least legally: they have sovereignty. But that does not mean they are isolated or insulated from each other. On the contrary, they adjoin each other and affect each other and must therefore somehow find ways to coexist and to deal with each other. In other words, they form an international state system, which is a core subject of IR. Furthermore, states are almost always involved with international markets that affect the economic policies of governments and the wealth and welfare of citizens. This requires that states enter into relations with each other. Complete isolation is usually not an option. When states are isolated and cut off from the state system, either by their own government or by foreign powers, people usually suffer as a result. That has been the situation at various times recently with regard to Myanmar, Libya, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Like most other social systems, the state system can have both advantages and disadvantages for the states involved as well as their people. IR is the study of the nature and consequences of these international relations.

The state system is a distinctive way of organizing political life on Earth and has deep historical roots. There have been state systems at different times and places in different parts of the world, in, for example, ancient China, ancient Greece, and Renaissance Italy (Watson 1992; Kaufman et al. 2007). However, the subject of IR conventionally dates back to the early modern era in Europe, when sovereign states based on adjacent territories were initially established. One of the prominent ideas in IR, namely that interstate relations should be kept in a form of ‘balance’, first seems to have been formulated by the Florentine statesman Lorenzo de’ Medici in the late fifteenth century (Watson 1992: 161). In the sixteenth century, it gained a more general traction in learned circles in Europe as a reaction against the **hegemony** aspirations of the Spanish Habsburg rulers Charles V and his son Philip II (Boucoyannis 2007: 713). Ever since the eighteenth century, relations between independent states have been labelled ‘international relations’. Initially, the state system was European. With the emergence of the United States in the late eighteenth century, it became Western. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, the state system expanded to encompass the entire territory of the Earth—east and west, north and south (Buzan and Lawson 2015). Today, IR is the study of the global state system from various scholarly perspectives, the most important of which will be discussed in this book.

The world of states is basically a territorial world. People must live somewhere on the planet, and those places must relate to each other in some way or other. The state system is a way of politically organizing populated territory, a distinctive kind of territorial political organization, based on numerous national governments that are legally independent of each other. To understand the significance of IR, it is necessary to grasp what living in states basically involves. What does it imply? How important is it? How should we think about it? This book is centrally concerned with these questions and especially with the last one. The chapters that follow deal with various answers to that fundamental question. This chapter examines the core historical subject matter of IR:

**FIGURE 1.1** Five basic social values

the evolution of the state system and the changing contemporary world of states. History is important because states and the state system had to come into existence, had to be a practical reality, before they could be studied theoretically. It is also important because it shows us that IR as a discipline largely generalizes from the European state system that eventually became the first global state system in history (Buzan and Lawson 2015; see Chapter 11).

*Why study IR?* To begin to respond to that question, it may be helpful to examine our everyday life as citizens of particular states to see what we generally expect from a state. There are at least five basic social values that states are usually expected to uphold: *security*, *freedom*, *order*, *justice*, and *welfare* (see Figure 1.1). These are social values that are so fundamental to human well-being that they must be protected or ensured in some way. That could be by social organizations other than the state, e.g., by families, clans, ethnic or religious organizations, villages, or cities. In the modern era, however, the state has usually been the leading institution in that regard: it is expected to ensure these basic values. For example, people generally assume the state should underwrite the value of security, which involves the protection of individual citizens and the people as a whole from internal and external threats. That is a fundamental concern or interest of states. However, the very existence of independent states affects the value of security; we live in a world of many states, almost all of which are armed at least to some degree and some of which are major military powers. Thus, states can both defend and threaten people's security. That paradox of the state system is usually referred to as the '*security dilemma*'. In other words, just like any other human organization, states present problems as well as provide solutions.

Most states are likely to be cooperative, non-threatening, and peace-loving most of the time. But some states may be hostile and aggressive at times and there is no world government to constrain them. That poses a basic and age-old problem of state systems: *national security*. To respond to that problem, most states possess armed forces. Military power is usually considered a necessity so that states can coexist and deal with each other without being intimidated or subjugated. Today there exist a number of countries without armed forces (including microstates such as Andorra, island states such as Samoa, and Central American states such as Costa Rica and Panama), so military power is not a defining attribute of a state. But unarmed states are extremely rare in the history of the state system. That is a basic fact of the state system of which we should never

lose sight. Many states also enter into alliances or defence organizations with other states to increase their national security. NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is by far the most important example of a military alliance in recent history.

To ensure that no great power succeeds in achieving a hegemonic position of overall domination, based on intimidation, coercion, or the outright use of force, history indicates it may be necessary to construct and maintain a **balance of power**. This approach to the study of world politics is typical of realist theories of IR (Morgenthau 1960). It operates on the assumption that relations of states can best be characterized as a world in which armed states are competing rivals and periodically go to war with each other.

The second basic value that states are usually expected to uphold is freedom, both personal freedom and national freedom or independence. A fundamental reason for having states and putting up with the burdens that governments place on citizens, such as taxes or obligations of military service, is the condition of national freedom or independence that states exist to foster. We cannot be free unless our country is free too: that was made very clear to millions of Czech, Polish, Danish, Norwegian, Belgian, Dutch, and French citizens, as well as citizens of other countries which were invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Even if our country is free, we may still not be free personally, but at least then the problem of our freedom is in our own hands. War threatens and sometimes destroys freedom. Peace fosters freedom. Peace also makes progressive international change possible, that is, the creation of a better world. War might also pave the way for progress but it normally does so by destroying established institutions, not by peaceful reforms. Peace and progressive change are obviously among the most fundamental values of international relations. That approach to the study of world politics is typical of liberal theories of IR (see Chapter 4). It operates on the assumption that international relations can best be characterized as a world in which states cooperate with each other to maintain peace and freedom and to pursue progressive change.

The third and fourth basic values that states are usually expected to uphold are order and justice. States have a common interest in establishing and maintaining international order so that they can coexist and interact on a basis of stability, certainty, and predictability. To that end, states are expected to uphold international law: to keep their treaty commitments and to observe the rules, conventions, and customs of the international legal order. This is the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* ('agreements must be kept'), which lies at the very core of international law. They are also expected to follow accepted practices of diplomacy and to support international organizations. International law, diplomatic relations, and international organizations can only exist and operate successfully if these expectations are generally met by most states most of the time. States are also expected to uphold human rights. Today, there is an elaborate international legal framework of human rights—civil, political, social, and economic—which has been developed since the end of the Second World War. Order and justice are obviously among the most fundamental values of international relations. That approach to the study of world politics is typical of the International Society theories of IR (Bull 1995). It operates on the assumption that international relations can best be

characterized as a world in which states are socially responsible actors and have a common interest in preserving international order and promoting international justice.

The final basic value that states are usually expected to uphold is the population's socioeconomic wealth and welfare. People expect their government to adopt appropriate policies to encourage high employment, low inflation, steady investment, the uninterrupted flow of trade and commerce, and so forth. Because national economies are rarely isolated from each other, most people also expect that the state will respond to the international economic system in such a way as to enhance or at least defend and maintain the national standard of living.

Most states nowadays try to frame and implement economic policies that can maintain the stability of the international economy upon which they are all increasingly dependent. This usually involves economic policies that can deal adequately with international markets, with the economic policies of other states, with foreign investment, with foreign exchange rates, with keeping banks solvent, with international trade, with international transportation and communications, and with other international economic relations and conditions that affect national wealth and welfare.

Economic interdependence, meaning a high degree of mutual economic dependence among countries, is a striking feature of the contemporary state system. Some people consider this to be a good thing because it may increase overall freedom and wealth by expanding economic globalization, thereby increasing participation, specialization, efficiency, and productivity. Other people consider it to be a bad thing because it may promote overall inequality by allowing rich and powerful countries, or countries with financial or technological advantages, to dominate poor and weak countries which lack those advantages. Still others consider national protectionism as preferable to economic interdependence as the best way to respond to financial and economic crises which periodically disrupt the world economy. But either way, wealth and welfare obviously are among the most fundamental values of international relations. That approach to the study of world politics is typical of IPE (International Political Economy) theories of IR (Gilpin 2001). It operates on the assumption that international relations can best be characterized as a fundamentally socioeconomic world and not merely a political and military world.

Most people usually take these basic values (security, freedom, order and justice, and welfare) for granted. They only become aware of them when something goes wrong—for example, during a war, a depression or a pandemic, when things begin to get beyond the control of individual states. On those acute learning occasions, people wake up to the larger circumstances of their lives which in normal times are a silent or invisible background. They become conscious of what they take for granted, and of how important these values really are in their everyday lives. We become aware of national security when a foreign power becomes belligerent, or when international terrorists engage in hostile actions against our country or one of our allies. We become aware of national independence and our freedom as citizens when peace is no longer guaranteed. We become aware of international order and justice when some states, especially major powers, threaten or attack others with armed force, or when they abuse, exploit, denounce, or disregard international law, or trample on human rights. We become

aware of national welfare and our own personal socioeconomic well-being when foreign countries or international investors use their economic clout to jeopardize our standard of living or when economic crisis spreads within the international system.

There were significant moments of heightened awareness of these major values during the twentieth century. The First World War made it dreadfully clear to most people just how devastatingly destructive of lives and living conditions modern mechanized warfare between major powers can be, and just how important it is to reduce the risk of war between great powers. That led to the first major developments of IR thought which tried to find effective legal institutions—such as the Covenant of the League of Nations—to prevent great-power war. Those efforts were not as successful as was hoped. But IR remains important because it seeks to understand as fully as possible the different ways that international relations can enhance but also undermine the quality of life in different countries around the world.

The Second World War not only underlined the reality of the dangers of great-power war; it also revealed how important it is to prevent any great power from getting out of control and how unwise it can be to pursue a policy of appeasement against a regime bent on expansion—which was adopted by Britain and France with regard to Nazi Germany just prior to the war, with disastrous consequences for everybody, including the German people.

The Great Depression (1929–33) brought home to many people around the world how their economic livelihood could be adversely affected, in some cases destroyed, by collapsing market conditions, not only at home but also in foreign countries. The global inflation of the 1970s and early 1980s, caused by a sudden dramatic increase in oil prices by the OPEC cartel of oil-exporting countries, was a reminder of how the interconnectedness of the global economy can be a threat to national and personal welfare anywhere in the world. For example, the oil shock of the 1970s made it abundantly clear to countless American, European, and Japanese motorists—among others—that the economic policies of the Middle East and other major oil-producing countries could suddenly raise the price of gas or petrol at the pump and lower their standard of living. The global financial crisis of 2008–9 recalled the lessons of the Great Depression; both crises were addressed and overcome by massive state intervention in the economic system, particularly the financial and banking sectors. Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has made it painstakingly clear that we live in an interconnected world where diseases leapfrog borders and where the global economic consequences of health measures in the form of lockdowns and quarantines can be severe. Furthermore, a larger, global threat to humanity, looms in the background: climate change is now a major issue on a par with the traditional issues of security and global economics. An increasing number of observers argue that climate change and environmental degradation are the most important, and acute, threat facing the international community, and that they are likely to reshape international relations in important ways (see Chapter 11).

For a long time, there has been a basic assumption that life inside properly organized and well-managed states is better than life outside states or without states at all. This was the fundamental insight of the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*. The late American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington (1968: 8) once expressed it

in the following way: ‘Men may, of course, have order without liberty, but they cannot have liberty without order.’ History reminds us of that fact. For example, the Jewish people spent well over half a century—or more than 2,000 years depending on what we emphasize—trying to get a state of their own, Israel, in which they could be secure. They finally succeeded in 1948. The Palestinian people are seeking their own state for the same reasons: they want to be masters of their own fate. As long as states and the state system manage to maintain the core values listed above, that assumption holds. That has generally been the case for developed countries, especially the states of Western Europe, North America, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and a few others. That gives rise to more conventional IR theories which regard the state system as a valuable core institution of modern life. The traditional IR theories discussed in this book tend to adopt that positive view (see Table 1.1).

But if states are not successful in that regard, the state system turns its ugly face: no longer upholding basic social conditions and values, but rather undermining them. More than a few states fail to ensure any of them. That is the case with regard to many states in the non-Western world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. The conditions inside some of these countries are so bad, so adverse to human well-being, that people are driven to flee to neighbouring countries to find safety. They are forced to become refugees. The plight of such people, whose numbers now run into the millions, questions the credibility and perhaps even the legitimacy of the state system. It indicates that the international system fosters or at least tolerates human suffering, and that the system should be changed so that people everywhere can flourish, and not just those in the developed or advanced countries of the world. That gives rise to more

TABLE 1.1 IR (theories and focus)	
THEORIES	FOCUS
• Realism	• Security power politics, conflict, and war
• Liberalism	• Freedom cooperation, peace, and progress
• International Society	• Order and justice shared interests, rules, and institutions
• IPE theories	• Welfare wealth, poverty, and equality
• Social constructivism	• Ideational factors ideas, norms, and intersubjective awareness
• Post-positivist approaches	• The way the world is represented power, emancipation, identity, and speech acts



**TABLE 1.2** Views of the state

TRADITIONAL VIEW	RADICAL OR <i>REVISIONIST</i> VIEW
States are valuable and necessary institutions: they provide security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare	States and the state system are social choices that create more problems than they solve
People benefit from the state system	The majority of the world's people suffer more than they benefit from the state system

critical IR theories which regard the state and the state system as a less beneficial and more problematic institution. The **post-positivist** or **radical** IR theories discussed later in this book (see particularly Chapter 8) tend to adopt that critical stance (see Table 1.2).

To sum up thus far: states and the system of states are territory-based social organizations which exist primarily to establish, maintain, and defend basic social conditions and values, particularly, security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare. These are the main reasons for having states. Many states, and certainly all developed countries, uphold these conditions and values at least to minimal standards and often at a much higher level. Indeed, those countries have been so successful in promoting those values over the past several centuries that standards of living have steadily increased and are now higher than ever. These countries set the international standard for the entire world. But many states fail to meet even minimal standards, and as a consequence their presence in the contemporary state system raises serious questions, not only about those states, but also about the state system of which they are an important part. The state system may be criticized, at a minimum, for tolerating adverse and harmful socio-economic conditions in some countries. At a maximum, it has been condemned for producing those conditions. One claim is that colonialism and imperialism have led to problems of dominance and underdevelopment in postcolonial countries that continue to this day (see Chapter 8). That has provoked a debate in IR between traditional theorists who by and large view the existing state system in positive terms, and radical theorists who by and large view it in negative terms.

## 1.2 Brief Historical Sketch of the Modern State System

States and the state system are such basic features of modern political life that it is easy to assume that they are permanent features: that they have always been and always will be present. That assumption is false. It is important to emphasize that the state system is a historical invention. It has been fashioned by certain people at a certain time: it is a social organization. Like all social organizations, the state system has advantages and disadvantages which change over time. There is nothing about the state system that is necessary to human existence. The following sketch of international history underlines that fact.



People have not always lived in sovereign states. For most of human history, they have organized their political lives in different ways, the most common being those of bands, tribes, or chiefdoms on a smaller scale (Diamond 1997), and that of political empire on a larger scale, such as the Roman Empire or the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire (see Box 1.1). In the future, the world may not be organized into a state system either. People may eventually give up on sovereign statehood. People throughout history have abandoned many other ways of organizing their political lives, including chiefdoms, city-states, empires, and colonialism, to mention a few. It is not unreasonable to suppose that a form of global political organization which is better or more advanced than states and the state system will eventually be adopted. Some IR scholars discussed in later chapters believe that such an international transformation, connected with growing interdependence among states (i.e., **globalization**), is already well under way. But the state system has been a central institution of world politics for a very long time, and still remains so. Even though world politics is always in flux, states and the state system have managed to adapt to significant historical change. Nobody can be sure that that will continue to be the case in the future, yet fundamental changes are difficult to fathom in the short to medium run. This issue of present and future international change is discussed later in the chapter.

There were no clearly recognizable sovereign states before the sixteenth century, when they first began to be instituted in Western Europe. But for the past three or four centuries, states and the system of states have structured the political lives of an ever-increasing number of people around the world. They have become universally popular. Today, the system is global in extent. The state and state system are the main points of reference in people's lives.

The era of the sovereign state coincides with the modern age of expanding power, prosperity, knowledge, science, technology, literacy, urbanization, citizenship, freedom, equality, rights, and so on. This could be a coincidence, but that is not very likely when we remember how important states and the state system have been in shaping the five fundamental human values discussed earlier. In fact, the state system and modernity are completely coexistent historically; the system of adjoining

### BOX 1.1 Key Developments: The Roman Empire

Rome began as a city state in central Italy . . . Over several centuries the city expanded its authority and adapted its methods of government to bring first Italy, then the western Mediterranean and finally almost the whole of the Hellenistic world into an empire larger than any which had existed in that area before . . . This unique and astonishing achievement, and the cultural transformation which it brought about, laid the foundations of European civilization . . . Rome helped to shape European and contemporary practice and opinion about the state, about international law and especially about empire and the nature of imperial authority.

**Watson (1992: 94)**

territorial states arose in Europe at the start of the modern era. And the state system has been a central if not defining feature of modernity ever since. Although the sovereign state emerged in Europe, it extended to North America in the late eighteenth century and to South America in the early nineteenth century. As modernity spread around the world, the state system spread with it. The reverse was also the case: the state system spread modernity because it was itself modern. Only slowly did it expand to cover the entire globe. Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, remained isolated from the expanding Western state system until the late nineteenth century, and it only became a regional state system after the middle of the twentieth century. Moreover, in the European overseas colonies the arrival of modernity did not mean the good life for all; it was also connected to hierarchy, dominance, and underdevelopment. According to critical scholarship, these structures have been reproduced after decolonization (see Chapter 8).

Of course, there is evidence of political systems that resembled sovereign states long before the modern age. They obviously had relations of some sort with each other. The historical origin of international relations in that more general sense lies deep in history and can only be a matter of speculation. But, speaking conceptually, it was a time when people began to settle down on the land and form themselves into separate territory-based political communities. This process has been described as ‘caging’, that is, agriculture made people settle down, cooperate, and develop new complex forms of social organization, hence the metaphor of a ‘cage’ (Mann 1986: 39–42). This caging did not create the modern states we know today but more primitive forerunners which lacked sophisticated political and bureaucratic institutions. The first examples of that occurred in the Middle East and date back more than 5,000 years (see Table 1.3), and the first relatively clear historical manifestation of a state system can be found in the Middle East in the third and second centuries BCE (Kaufman 1997).

The relations between independent political groups make up the core problem of international relations. They are built on a fundamental distinction between our collective

**TABLE 1.3** City-states and empires

550 BCE–330 BCE	Persian Empire
500 BCE–100 BCE	Greek city-states system (Hellas)
330 BCE–31 BCE	Hellenistic states: Antigonid, Seleucid, and Ptolemaic Empires
200 BCE–AD 500	Roman Empire
306–1453	Orthodox Christianity: Eastern Empire, Constantinople
800–1806	Catholic Christendom: Western Empire
1299–1923	Ottoman (Turkish) Empire, Istanbul (Constantinople)
Other historical empires	Persia, India (Mogul), China

selves and other collective selves in a finite territorial world of many such separate collective selves in contact with each other. Here we arrive at a preliminary definition of a state system: it stands for relations between separate human groupings which occupy distinctive territories, are not under any higher authority or power, and enjoy and exercise a measure of independence from each other. International relations are primarily relations between such independent groups.

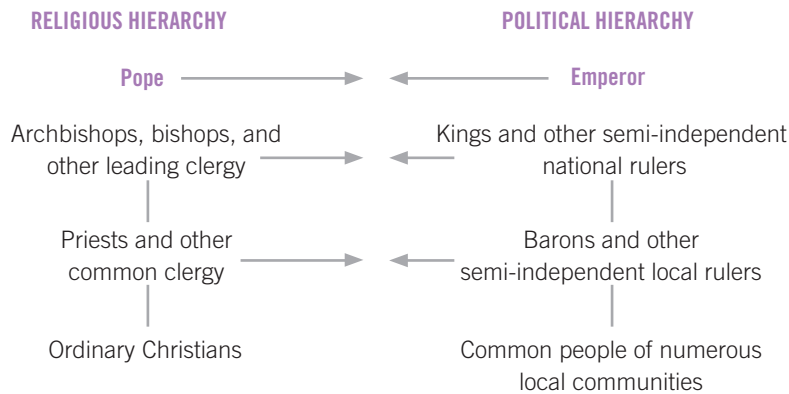
A good historical example is ancient China in the aptly named Warring States Period from 480 BCE to 221 BCE. Here we find scores of independent states, complete with many of the administrative institutions that came to characterize the modern state, fighting it out in a life and death environment strikingly similar to the later European experience (Parker 1996 [1988]: 2–4). We return to these earlier instances of multistate systems in Chapter 11. Here, we concentrate on the lineages of the European state system, which in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries became the first global state system.

The first state system in Western history is that of ancient Greece (500–100 BCE), then known as ‘Hellas’. Ancient Greece did not make up a system of nation-states as we know them today. Rather, it was a system of city-states, far smaller in population and territory than most modern states and governed directly by the citizens (Wight 1977; Watson 1992). Athens was the largest and most famous, but there were numerous other city-states, such as Sparta, Thebes, and Corinth. Greek intercity relations involved distinctive traditions and practices, but they lacked the institution of diplomacy, and there was nothing comparable to international law and international organization. The state system of Hellas was based on a shared language and a common religion—Greek culture—more than anything else.

The ancient Greek state system was eventually destroyed by more powerful neighbouring empires, and in due course the Greeks became subjects of the Roman Empire, which occupied most of Europe and a large part of the Middle East and North Africa. Rome’s two main successors in Europe were also empires: in Western Europe, the Frankish empire of Charlemagne, which was succeeded by the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (the Western empire for short); in Eastern Europe and the near east, the Byzantine (Eastern) Empire centred on Constantinople or what is today Istanbul (Byzantium). The Byzantine Empire claimed to be the continuation of the Christianized Roman Empire. There were other political systems and empires further afield. North Africa and the Middle East formed a world of Islamic civilization which originated in the Arabian peninsula in the early years of the seventh century. There were empires in what are today China, Iran, and India. Across the land mass of Eurasia, the Middle Ages (500–1500) were thus an era of empire and the relations and conflicts of different empires. But contact between empires was intermittent at best; communications were slow and transportation was difficult. Consequently, most empires at that time were a world unto themselves.

Can we speak of ‘international relations’ in Western Europe during the medieval era? Not in the modern sense. States existed, often in the form of kingdoms, but they were not independent or sovereign in the modern meaning of these words. There were no clearly defined territories with delineated borders. The medieval world was not a geographical patchwork of sharply differentiated colours representing different independent

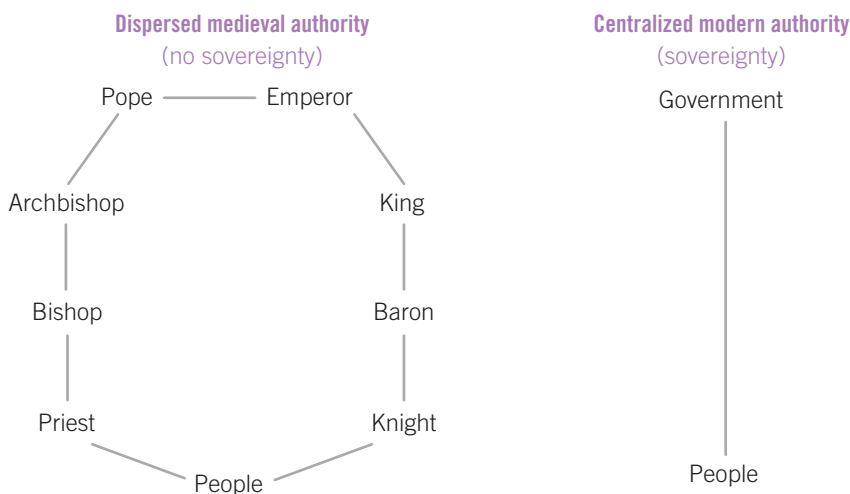
**FIGURE 1.2** The Christian commonwealth of medieval Europe in the early eleventh century



countries (see Figure 1.2). On the contrary, it was a complicated and confusing intermingling of overlapping territories of varying shades and hues. Power and authority were organized on both a religious and political basis: in Latin Christendom, the Pope headed a parallel but connected hierarchy centred on the Roman Church. Kings were not fully independent. And much of the time, local rulers were more or less free from the rule of kings: they were semi-autonomous but they were not fully independent either. The territorial political independence we know today was only beginning to appear in medieval Europe (see Figure 1.3).

There was therefore no clear distinction between civil war and international war. Medieval wars were more likely to be fought over issues of rights and wrongs: wars to

**FIGURE 1.3** Medieval and modern authority



defend the faith, wars sparked by perceived transgressions of traditional liberties of elite groups, wars to resolve conflicts over dynastic inheritance, wars to punish outlaws, wars to collect debts, and so on (Howard 1976: Ch. 1). Wars were less likely to be fought over the exclusive control of territory or over state or national interests (Sharma 2017). In medieval Europe, there was no exclusively controlled territory, only a chequerboard of divided authority, and no clear conception of the nation or the national interest.

The values connected with sovereign statehood were arranged differently in medieval times. The key to that difference is the fact that no one political organization, such as the sovereign state, catered for all these values. That high degree of political and legal integration of territorial societies had yet to occur.

What did the political change from medieval to modern basically involve? The short answer is: it eventually consolidated the provision of these values within the single framework of one unified and independent social organization: the sovereign state. Though the transition to the modern state system occurred late in the day, the beginnings of this process must be traced deep into the Middle Ages. Paradoxically, the eleventh-century divide between secular and religious rulers helped pave the way. This split began in earnest in 1075 when Pope Gregory VII challenged the right of monarchs and princes to appoint clergy, most importantly, bishops (see Box 1.2). The result was the emancipation of the Church from the Western empire during what has been termed the 'Papal Revolution of 1075–1122' (Berman 1983: 19). The conflict between the church and the emperor bolstered the state system by ensuring that the later nation-states would be competitors. To weaken the emperor, the Church recognized the maxim that kings were 'emperors' in their own realms (*Rex in regno suo imperator*). This was the first important step in the direction of 'the modern doctrine of the equality of states in international law' (Oakley 2012: 3) and hence towards the emergence of sovereign states (Spruyt 2017). Medieval popes did their utmost to avoid a scenario where any secular ruler in Western Europe gained pre-eminence over the others (Møller 2020).

But the secular rulers struck back. In the early modern era, European rulers liberated themselves from the overarching religious–political authority of Christendom. They

### BOX 1.2 Key Developments: Henry IV's 'walk to Canossa'

In December 1075, Gregory made known the contents of his Papal Manifesto, as it might be called today, in a letter to Emperor Henry IV in which he demanded the subordination of the emperor and of the imperial bishops to Rome. Henry replied, as did twenty-six of his bishops, in letters of January 24, 1076. Henry's letter begins: 'Henry, king not through usurpation but through the holy ordination of God, to Hildebrand, at present not pope but false monk . . .' In response, Gregory excommunicated and deposed Henry, who in January 1077 journeyed as a humble penitent to the pope in Canossa where, tradition has it, he waited three days to present himself barefoot in the snow and to confess his sins and declare his contrition.

**Berman (1983: 96–7)**

also freed themselves from their dependence on the military power of barons and other local feudal leaders. The kings subordinated the barons and defied the pope, as they had earlier defied the emperor. They became defenders of their own sovereignty against internal disorder and external threat. Their sovereignty later evolved into state sovereignty. Peasants began their long journey to escape from their dependence on local feudal rulers to become the direct subjects of the king: they eventually became ‘the people’ upon whom sovereignty came to rest: popular sovereignty.

In short, power and authority were concentrated at one point: the king and his government. The king now ruled a territory with borders which were defended against outside interference. The king became the supreme authority over all the people in the country, and no longer had to operate via intermediate authorities and rulers. That fundamental political transformation marks the advent of the modern era (see Box 1.3).

One of the major effects of the rise of the modern state was its monopoly of the means of warfare within its area of control (see Box 1.4). The king first created order at home and became the sole centre of power within the country. Knights and barons who had formerly controlled their own armies now took orders from the king. Many kings then looked outward with an ambition to expand their territories or out of fear that a neighbouring ruler would invade and conquer them. As a result, international rivalries developed which often resulted in wars and the enlargement of some countries at the expense of others. Spain, France, Austria, England, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, Prussia, Poland, Russia, and other states of the new European state system were frequently at war. War became a key institution for resolving conflicts between sovereign states and enforcing international law.

### BOX 1.3 Key Developments: The Advent of the Modern State

[F]irst, politics came to be regarded as a discrete realm, independent of theology; secondly, the supreme authority in any polity came to be regarded as independent of any international agency such as the papacy or Holy Roman Empire; and thirdly, that authority also claimed a monopoly of legislation and allegiance within its borders.

**Blanning (2007: 287)**

### BOX 1.4 Key Developments: The Thirty Years War (1618–48)

Starting initially in Bohemia as an uprising of the Protestant aristocracy against Spanish authority, the war escalated rapidly, eventually incorporating all sorts of issues . . . Questions of religious toleration were at the root of the conflict . . . But by the 1630s, the war involved a jumble of conflicting states, with all sorts of cross-cutting dynastic, religious, and state interests involved . . . Europe was fighting its first continental war.

**Holsti (1991: 26–8)**

In the traditional view, the political change from medieval to modern thus basically involved the construction of independent territorial states with extensive administrative institutions across Europe. The state captured its territory and turned it into state property, and it captured the population of that territory and turned them into subjects and later citizens. One is again reminded of the metaphor of ‘caging’ populations. In the modern international system, territory is consolidated, unified, and centralized under a sovereign government. The population of the territory owe allegiance to that government and have a duty to obey its laws. All institutions are now subordinate to state authority and public law. The familiar territorial patchwork map is in place, in which each patch is under the exclusive jurisdiction of a particular state. All of the territory of Europe and eventually that of the entire planet, except Antarctica, became partitioned by independent governments. The historical end point of the medieval era and the starting point of the modern international system, speaking very generally, is usually identified with the Thirty Years War (1618–48, see Box 1.4) and the Peace of Westphalia which brought it to an end (see Box 1.5).

From the middle of the seventeenth century, states were seen as the only legitimate political systems of Europe, based on their own separate territories, their own independent governments, and their own political subjects. The emergent state system had several prominent characteristics, which can be summarized. First, it consisted of adjoining states whose legitimacy and independence were mutually recognized. Second, that recognition of states did not extend outside of the European state system. Non-European political systems were not members of the state system. They were usually regarded as alien and politically inferior and most of them were eventually subordinated to European imperial rule. Third, the relations of European states were subject to international law and diplomatic practices. In other words, they were expected

### BOX 1.5 Key Concepts: The Peace of Westphalia (1648)

The Westphalian settlement legitimized a commonwealth of sovereign states. It marked the triumph of the *stato* [the state], in control of its internal affairs and independent externally. This was the aspiration of princes [rulers] in general—and especially of the German princes, both Protestant and Catholic, in relation to the [Holy Roman or Habsburg] empire. The Westphalian treaties stated many of the rules and political principles of the new society of states . . . The settlement was held to provide a fundamental and comprehensive charter for all Europe.

#### **Watson (1992: 186)**

. . . the essentially secular basis of the new state system was strongly reaffirmed when the principle, *Cujus regio, ejus religio* (Such government in a state, such religion in a state) first enunciated at Augsburg in 1555, was enshrined in the Peace of Westphalia and extended to cover Calvinism in addition to Lutheranism.

#### **Wilkinson (2007: 15)**

to observe the rules of the international game. Fourth, there was a balance of power between member states which was intended to prevent any one state from getting out of control and making a successful bid for **hegemony**, which would in effect re-establish an empire over the continent.

There were several major attempts by different powers to impose their political hegemony on the continent. The Habsburg Empire (Austria) made the attempt during the reigns of Charles V in the sixteenth century and again during the Thirty Years War (1618–48), and was blocked by different coalitions which included states such as the Netherlands, France, Sweden, and even (though more informally) the Ottoman Empire. France made the attempt under King Louis XIV (1661–1714) and was eventually blocked by an English–Dutch–Austrian alliance. Napoleon (1795–1815) made the attempt and was blocked by Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria. A post-Napoleonic balance of power among the great powers (the Concert of Europe) held for most of the period between 1815 and 1914. Germany made the attempt under Hitler (1939–45), and was blocked by the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain. For the past 350 years—or for 1,000 years if we include the opposition against the hegemony of Western emperors in the Middle Ages—the European state system has managed to resist the main political tendency of world history, which is the attempt by strong powers to bend weaker powers to their political will and thereby establish an empire (see Chapter 11). As the Cold War came to an end, it was debated whether the sole remaining superpower, the United States, had become a global hegemon in this meaning of the term. The rise of China and the reassertion of Russian military power cast serious doubt on that assertion. Instead, it suggests that the international system is again establishing a bipolar or multipolar world of great powers.

This traditional or classical view has been questioned. In Carvalho et al.'s (2011) revisionist interpretation, the story of Westphalia is a historical myth invented by IR scholars who wanted to create a foundational basis in history for their realist or International Society theories (see also Osiander 2001). The revisionists argue that there is no solid basis in the historical evidence for the traditional claim that the modern, post-medieval system or society of states emerged out of the Peace of Westphalia and successive episodes, such as the Congress of Vienna (1815) or the Peace of Paris (1919). They argue that historical scholarship has 'demolished these myths', but they note that traditional or classical IR scholarship nevertheless persists in reiterating them. The revisionists argue that realist or international society scholars do not wish to lose their predominant position in the discipline and so they perpetuate the Westphalian myth in their textbooks used in teaching future IR scholars.

These conflicting interpretations are not merely different points of view or selections of evidence. Rather, they are based on different methodological or even philosophical assumptions and approaches. The traditionalists are historicists and empiricists, in the sense that they see existential evidence of the birth of modern statehood in the Westphalian episode. For them, it is the historical occasion when the sovereign state and the anarchic state system came into existence as the dominant political feature of the European world: state sovereignty, state-controlled military power, diplomatic interaction and negotiation, peace settlement, treaties, etc. The revisionists, on the other hand, are constructivists and



critical theorists. They view Westphalia as a conception or construction of IR scholars that promotes their theoretical biases. For them, the historical reality, the actual Westphalia, was an ambiguous world of contradictory and confusing ideas and beliefs, and was far from a sharp and defining historical break with the past. Methodological issues such as these are examined in Part 2. Suffice it here to say that our historical overview shows that the development of the European state system proceeded in a more gradual way than implied by the story centred on 1648. We can speak of a nascent state system deep into the high Middle Ages (1000–1300) and if we were to identify its roots, the eleventh-century split between religious and secular rulers deserves to be highlighted.

### 1.3 Globalization and the State System

While creating a state system in Europe, the Europeans also constructed vast overseas empires and a world economy by which they controlled most political communities in the rest of the world. The Western states that could not dominate each other succeeded in dominating much of the rest of the world both politically and economically (see Box 1.6). That outward control of the non-European world by Europeans began at the start of the early modern era in the sixteenth century. It accelerated in the nineteenth century and lasted until the middle of the twentieth century, when the non-Western peoples finally broke free of Western colonialism and acquired political independence. The fact that no single Western state was able to completely dominate the European state system but that the Western states were capable of imposing European sovereignty and control on almost everybody elsewhere has been crucially important in shaping the modern international system. The global ascendancy and supremacy of the West are vital for understanding IR even today (Buzan and Lawson 2015). Whether that may now be changing with the rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, and—to a lesser extent—the emergence of India and Brazil is a question that can be asked and is being asked both inside and outside the West.

#### BOX 1.6 Key Quotes: President McKinley on American imperialism in the Philippines (1899)

When I realized that the Philippines [a Spanish colony] had dropped into our laps [as a result of America's military defeat of Spain] . . . I did not know what to do . . . one night late it came to me this way . . . (1) that we could not give them back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonourable; (2) that we could not turn them over to France or Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable; (3) that we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's was; and (4) that there was nothing left for us to do but take them . . . [and] put the Philippines on the map of the United States.

**Bridges et al. (1969: 184)**

The first stage of the globalization of the state system was the transplantation of Western states to the Americas; the second stage occurred via the incorporation of non-Western states that could not be colonized (see Box 1.7). Not every non-Western country fell under the political control of a Western imperial state; but countries that escaped colonization were still obliged to accept the rules of the Western state system. This occurred in the nineteenth century when the Western countries developed the ability to project power globally. This meant that previously isolated regional state systems such as the European and the East Asian ones coalesced into a global state system (Buzan and Lawson 2015: 2). The Ottoman Empire (Turkey) is one example: it was forced to accept the Western rules by the Treaty of Paris in 1854. Japan is another example: it acquiesced to them later in the nineteenth century. Japan rapidly acquired the organizational substance and constitutional shape of a modern state. By the early twentieth century, it had become a great power—as demonstrated by its military defeat of an existing great power, Russia, on the battlefield: the Russo–Japanese war of 1904–5. China was obliged to accept the rules of the Western state system during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. China was not acknowledged and fully recognized as a great power until 1945.

Some recent scholarship has argued forcefully that international relations in its present form were created during the ‘long nineteenth century’ (1789–1914) and that we today live ‘in a world defined predominantly by the downstream consequences of the nineteenth-century global transformation’ (Buzan and Lawson 2015: 5). The third stage of the globalization of the state system was brought about via anti-colonialism by the colonial subjects of Western empires. In that struggle, indigenous political leaders made claims for decolonization and independence based on European and American ideas of self-determination. That ‘revolt against the West’, as Hedley Bull put it, was the main vehicle by which the state system expanded dramatically after the Second World War (Bull and Watson 1984). In the short period of some twenty years, beginning

### **BOX 1.7** Key Quotes: President Ho Chi Minh’s 1945 declaration of independence of the Republic of Vietnam

All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness . . . All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, be happy and free . . . We members of the provisional Government, representing the whole population of Vietnam, have declared and renew here our declaration that we break off all relations with the French people and abolish all the special rights the French have unlawfully acquired in our Fatherland . . . We are convinced that the Allied nations which have acknowledged at Teheran and San Francisco the principles of self-determination and equality of status will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam . . . For these reasons we . . . declare to the world that Vietnam has the right to be free and independent.

**Bridges et al. (1969: 311–12)**

### BOX 1.8 Key Developments: Global expansion of the state system

1200s Latin Christendom (nascent European system)  
 1600s + Russia (European system)  
 1700s + North America (Western system)  
 1800s + South America, Ottoman Empire, Japan (globalizing system)  
 1900s + Asia, Africa, Caribbean, Pacific (global system)

with the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, most colonies in Asia and Africa became independent states and members of the United Nations (UN) (see Box 1.8).

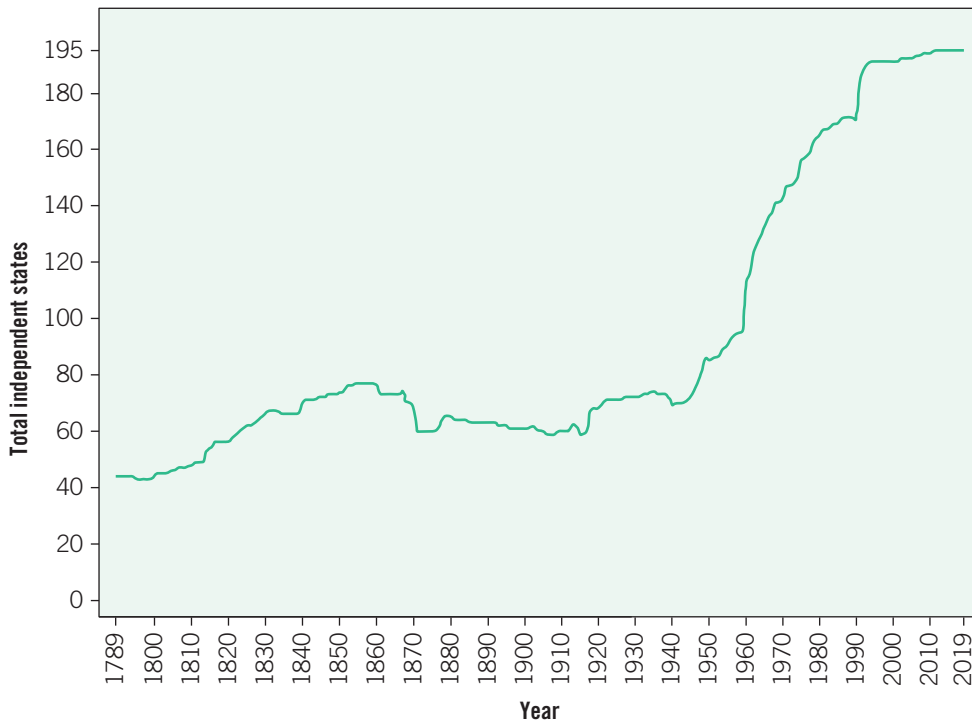
European decolonization in the developing (or postcolonial) world more than tripled the membership of the UN from about fifty states in 1945 to more than 160 states by 1970. About 70 per cent of the world's population were citizens or subjects of independent states in 1945 and were thus represented in the state system; by 1995, that figure had increased to virtually 100 per cent. The spread of European political and economic control beyond Europe thus eventually proved to be an expansion of the state system which became completely global in the second half of the twentieth century. The final stage of the globalization of the state system was the dissolution of the Soviet Union, together with the simultaneous break-up of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia at the end of the Cold War (see Figure 1.4). UN membership reached almost 200 states by the end of the twentieth century.

Today, the state system is a global institution that affects the lives of virtually everybody on Earth, whether they realize it or not. That means that IR is now more than ever a universal academic subject. It also means that world politics at the start of the twenty-first century must accommodate a range and variety of states that are far more diverse—in terms of their cultures, religions, languages, ideologies, forms of government, military capacity, technological sophistication, levels of economic development, etc.—than ever before. That is a fundamental change in the state system and a fundamental challenge for IR scholars to theorize.

## 1.4 IR and the Changing Contemporary World of States

Many important questions in the study of IR are connected with the theory and practice of sovereign statehood, which, as indicated, is the central historical institution of world politics. But there are other important issues as well. That has led to ongoing debates about the proper scope of IR. At one extreme, the scholarly focus is exclusively on states and interstate relations; at the other extreme, IR includes almost everything that has to do with human relations across the world. It is important to study these different perspectives if we hope to have a balanced and rounded knowledge of IR.

Our reason for linking the various IR theories to states and the state system is to acknowledge the historical centrality of that subject. Even theorists who seek to go beyond the state usually take it as a starting point: the state system is the main point of reference for both traditional and newer approaches. Later chapters will explore how IR

**FIGURE 1.4** Number of independent states, 1789–2019

Note: Data from Skaaning, SE., Gerring, J., Bartusevicius, H. (2015). 'A Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy' *Comparative Political Studies*, 48/12: 1491–1525, at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/29106>, Harvard Dataverse, V6.

scholarship has attempted to come to grips with the sovereign state. There are debates about how we should conceptualize the state, and different IR theories take somewhat different approaches. In later chapters, we shall present contemporary debates on the future of the state. Whether its central importance in world politics may now be changing is an essential question in contemporary IR scholarship. But the fact is that states and the state system remain at the centre of academic analysis and discussion in IR.

We must, of course, be alert to the fact that the sovereign state is a contested theoretical concept. When we ask the questions 'What is the state?' and 'What is the state system?', there will be different answers, depending on the theoretical approach adopted; the realist answer will be different from the liberal answer, and those answers will be different from the International Society answer and from the answer given by IPE theories, or by social constructivists or post-positivists. None of these answers is, strictly speaking, either correct or incorrect because the truth is that the state is a multifaceted and somewhat confusing entity. It is not a thing in itself. It is a historical idea and institution that are open to a variety of interpretations and understandings. There are different concepts of the state. There is disagreement about the scope and purpose of the state. The state system consequently is not an easy subject to grasp theoretically, and it can be understood in various ways and with contrasting points of emphasis.

There are, however, ways of simplifying it. It is helpful to think of the state as having two dimensions, each divided into two broad categories. The first dimension is the state as a government versus the state as a country. Viewed from within, the state is the national government: it is the highest governing authority in a country, and possesses domestic sovereignty. That is the *internal* aspect of the state. The main questions in regard to the internal aspect concern *state–society* relations: how the government rules the domestic society, the means of its power and the sources of its legitimacy, how it deals with the demands and concerns of individuals and groups that compose that domestic society, how it manages the national economy, what its domestic policies are, and so forth.

Viewed internationally, however, the state is not merely a government; it is a populated territory with a national government and a domestic society. In other words, it is a country. From that angle, both the government and the domestic society make up the state. If a country is a sovereign state, it will be generally recognized as such. That is the *external* aspect of the state in which the main questions concern *interstate* relations: how the governments and societies of states relate to each other and deal with each other, what the basis of those interstate relations is, what the foreign policies of particular states are, what the international organizations of the states are, how people from different states interact with each other and engage in transactions with each other, and so forth.

That brings us to the second dimension of the state, which divides the external aspect of sovereign statehood into two broad categories. The first category is the state viewed as a *formal* or legal institution in its relations with other states. That is the state as an entity that is constitutionally independent of all foreign states, is recognized as sovereign or independent by most of those states, enjoys membership in international organizations, and possesses various rights and obligations under international law. We shall refer to that first category as **'juridical' statehood**. Constitutional independence and recognition are essential elements of juridical statehood. Constitutional independence indicates that no foreign state claims or has any legal authority over a state. The constitution of an independent country belongs exclusively to that country. Recognition acknowledges that fact of independence, and paves the way for membership of international society, including membership of the UN. The absence of constitutional independence and recognition denies it. Not every country is independent and recognized as such; an example is Quebec, which is a province of Canada. To become independent it must be separate from Canada and be recognized as such by existing sovereign states, by far the most important of which for Quebec are, first, Canada and, second, the United States (see Table 1.4).

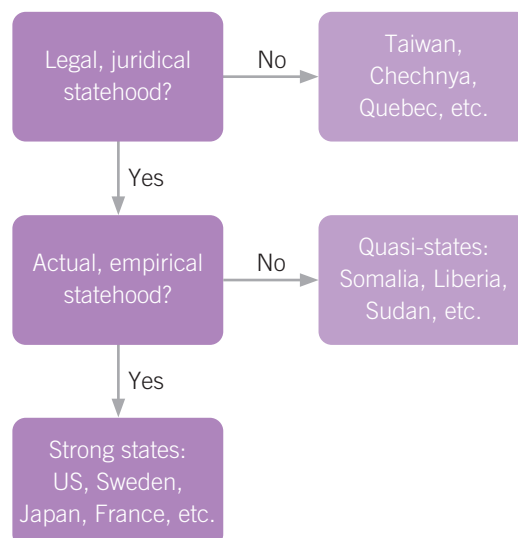
**TABLE 1.4** External dimensions of statehood

<b>The state as a country:</b>	Territory, government, society
<b>Legal, juridical statehood:</b>	Recognition by other states
<b>Actual, empirical statehood:</b>	Political institutions, economic basis, national unity

There are fewer independent countries than there could have been. Quebec, Scotland (part of Great Britain), and Catalonia (part of Spain) could each be independent. A referendum in Quebec (1995) and another in Scotland (2014) each failed to secure enough votes for independence. Catalonia has thus far not succeeded in getting the Spanish government to accept an independence referendum for that part of the country. Most countries refuse to allow secession. In many, it would be unthinkable. Russia's wars to subdue Chechnya in the late 1990s serve as both an example and a warning to other secessionist regions. The international state system is generally unsympathetic to the idea of dividing the territory of countries. Existing countries would lose not only territory but also population, resources, power, status, and so on. Partition would also set a precedent that could destabilize the state system if a growing number of currently subordinated but potentially independent countries lined up to demand sovereign statehood or union with a foreign country. This latter demand is widely seen as particularly dangerous. That is strikingly evident in the widespread international concern, particularly of the European Union (EU) and the United States, in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in the civil war in eastern Ukraine in 2014. It is also illustrated by the EU's rather cold response to Catalanian aspirations for independence. The international state system reveals a major predilection, or bias, in favour of the preservation of existing borders between countries. That is widely understood as an essential element of international order.

The second category is the state viewed as a substantial political-economic organization (see Figure 1.5). That category has to do with the extent to which states have developed efficient political institutions, a solid economic basis, and a substantial degree of national unity; that is, of popular unity and support for the state. We shall refer to that second category as **'empirical' statehood**. Some states are very strong in the sense that

**FIGURE 1.5** State types in the global state system



they have a high level of empirical statehood. Most states in the West are like that. Many of those states are small, for example Denmark, Holland, and Luxembourg. A strong state in the sense of a high level of empirical statehood should be held separate from the notion of a strong power in the military sense. Some strong states are not militarily powerful; Denmark is an example. Some strong powers in the military sense, such as Russia, are not particularly strong states. On the other hand, the United States is both a strong state and a strong power (see Table 1.5).

This distinction between empirical statehood and juridical statehood is of fundamental importance because it helps to capture the very significant differences that exist between the almost 200 currently independent and formally equal states of the world. States differ enormously in the legitimacy of their political institutions, the effectiveness of their governmental organizations, their economic wealth and productivity, their political influence and status, and their national unity. Not all states possess effective national governments. Some states, both large and small, are solid and capable organizations: they are strong states. Some tiny island microstates in the Pacific Ocean are so small that they can hardly afford to have a government at all. Other states may be fairly large in terms of territory or population or both—e.g., Sudan or the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaïre)—but they are not well-functioning; sometimes they can hardly be called states at all (Herbst 2000). A large number of states, especially in the **Global South**, have a low degree of empirical statehood. Their institutions are weak, the economic basis is frail and underdeveloped, and there is little or no national unity. We can refer to these states as fragile states or **quasi-states**: they possess juridical statehood but they are severely deficient in empirical statehood (Jackson 1990). Whether colonialism and imperialism or domestic actors in fragile states are primarily to blame for this situation is a major issue in the debate about sovereign statehood.

Some IPE scholars, usually Marxists, make underdevelopment of peripheral countries and the unequal relations between the centre (the developed countries) and the periphery (the undeveloped countries) of the global economy the crucial explanatory element of their theory of the modern international system (Wallerstein 1974). They investigate international linkages between the poverty of the developing world, or the South, and the enrichment of the United States, Europe, and other parts of the North. They see the international economy as one overall ‘world system’, with the developed capitalist states at the centre flourishing at the expense of the weak, underdeveloped states suffering on

TABLE 1.5 Examples of strong/weak states—strong/weak powers		
	STRONG POWER	WEAK POWER
STRONG STATE	USA, China, France	Denmark, New Zealand, Singapore
WEAK STATE	Pakistan, North Korea, Nigeria	Somalia, Libya, Liberia

the periphery. According to these scholars, legal equality and political independence—what we have designated as juridical statehood—are scarcely more than a polite façade that merely obscures the extreme vulnerability of underdeveloped states and their domination and exploitation by the rich capitalist states of the West. Postcolonial approaches further develop this discussion of subordination and point to the eurocentrism (the pre-occupation with the West) of dominant approaches to IR.

The underdeveloped countries certainly disclose in a striking way the profound empirical inequalities of the contemporary world. But it is their possession of juridical statehood, reflecting their membership of the state system, which places that issue in sharp perspective. It highlights the fact that the populations of some states—the developed countries—enjoy far better living conditions in virtually every respect than the populations of other states; that is, the underdeveloped countries. The fact that underdeveloped countries belong to the same global state system as developed countries raises different questions from those that would arise if they belonged to entirely separate systems; that is, the situation that existed before the global state system came into existence. We can see the issues of security, freedom and progress, order and justice, and wealth and poverty far more clearly when they involve members of the same international system. For *inside* a system the same general standards and expectations apply. So if some states cannot meet common standards or expectations because of their underdevelopment, it becomes an international problem and not only a domestic problem or somebody else's problem. This is a major change from the past when most non-Western political systems either were outside the state system and operated according to different standards, or were colonies of Western imperial powers that were responsible for them as a matter of domestic policy rather than foreign policy (see Table 1.6).

These developments are a reminder that the world of states is a dynamic, changing world and not a static, unchanging one. The world is always in flux, at least in the modern age we live in. In international relations, as in other spheres of human relations, nothing stands still for very long. International relations change along with everything else: politics, economics, science, technology, education, culture, and the rest. An obvious case in point is technological innovation, which has profoundly shaped international relations from the beginning and continues to shape it in significant ways that are never entirely predictable. Over the centuries new or improved military technology has had an impact on the balance of power, arms races, imperialism and colonialism, military

**TABLE 1.6** Insiders and outsiders in the state system

PREVIOUS STATE SYSTEM	PRESENT STATE SYSTEM
Small core of insiders, all strong states	Virtually all states are recognized insiders, possessing formal or juridical statehood
Many outsiders: colonies and non-Western states	Big differences between insiders: dependencies; some strong states, some weak quasi-states



alliances, the nature of war, and much else besides. Economic growth has permitted greater wealth to be devoted to military budgets, and has thus provided a foundation for the development of larger, better-equipped, and more effective military forces. Scientific discoveries have made possible new technologies, such as transportation or information technologies, which have had the effect of knitting the world more closely together. Literacy, mass education, and expanded higher education have enabled governments to increase their capacity and expand their activities into more and more specialized spheres of society and economy.

It cuts both ways, of course, because highly educated people do not like being told what to think or what to do (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Changing cultural values and ideas have affected not only the foreign policy of particular states but also the shape and direction of international relations. For example, the ideologies of anti-racism and anti-imperialism that were first articulated by outspoken intellectuals in Western countries eventually weakened Western overseas empires, and helped bring about the decolonization process by making the moral justification for colonialism increasingly difficult and eventually impossible.

Examples of the impact of social change on international relations are almost endless in their number and variety. The relationship is undoubtedly reversible: the state system also has an impact on society, economy, science, technology, education, culture, and the rest. For example, it has been compellingly argued that it was the development of a state system in Europe that was decisive in propelling that continent ahead of all other continents during the modern era. The competition of the independent European states within their state system—their military competition, their economic competition, their scientific and technological competition—catapulted those states ahead of non-European political systems which were not spurred by the same degree of competition. One scholar has made the point as follows: ‘The states of Europe . . . were surrounded by actual or potential competitors. If the government of one were lax, it impaired its own prestige and military security . . . The state system was an insurance against economic and technological stagnation’ (Jones 1981: 104–26). We should not conclude, therefore, that the state system merely reacts to change; it is also a cause of change (Tilly 1990).

The fact of social change raises a more fundamental question. At some point, should we expect states to change so much that they are no longer states in the sense discussed here? For example, if the process of economic globalization continues and makes the world one single marketplace and one single production site, will the state system then be obsolete? We have in mind the following activities which might bypass states: ever-increasing international trade and investment; expanding multinational business activity; enlarged NGO activities; increasing regional and global communications; the growth of the Internet; expanding and ever-extending transportation networks; exploding travel and tourism; massive human migration; cumulative environmental pollution; accelerating global warming; expanded regional integration; the global expansion of science and technology; continuous downsizing of government; multiplying privatization; and other activities that have the effect of increasing interdependence across borders.

Or will sovereign states and the state system find ways of adapting to those social changes, just as they have adapted time and again to other major changes during the

past 350 years? Some of those changes were just as fundamental: the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century; the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century; the encounter of Western and non-Western civilizations over the course of several centuries; the growth of Western imperialism and colonialism; the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the rise and spread of nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the revolution of anti-colonialism and decolonization in the twentieth century; the spread of mass public education; the growth of the welfare state; the control of disease, the spread of public health, the increase in life expectancy; and much else. Turning to the present, the vote that led to 'Brexit' in 2016 and the more general legitimacy crisis of the European Union are pretty clear testimony that citizens still see the nation-state as their main political reference point—and that they are unwilling to shift their allegiance to the supranational level. The response to the financial crisis in 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 also demonstrated that states are still the most important players, both in economic and political terms, and with respect to the security of their citizens. Nonetheless, the question about the future of the state is one of the most fundamental questions of contemporary IR scholarship, and we should keep it in mind when we speculate about the future of international relations.

## 1.5 Conclusion

The modern state system was European in the first instance. During the era of Western imperialism, the rest of the world came to be dominated by Europeans and Americans, either politically or economically or both. Only with decolonization, after the Second World War, did the state system become global. The globalization of the state system vastly increased the variety of its member states and consequently its diversity. The most important difference is between strong states with a high level of empirical statehood and weak quasi-states, which have formal sovereignty but very little substantial statehood. In other words, decolonization contributed to a huge and deep internal division in the state system between the rich North and the poor South; i.e., between developed countries at the centre, which dominate the system politically and economically, and underdeveloped countries at the peripheries, which have limited political and economic influence.

Recently, this divergence between developed and underdeveloped countries has taken a more complex and worrying turn. Collapsed states have emerged, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, which have had the unintended effect of setting the foreign policy and military policy agendas of advanced countries. The erosion and sometimes breakdown of government power and authority in these areas have created vacuums of power and authority. That has set the stage for the emergence of armed terrorist organizations that are particularly hostile not only to their own governments, or Western governments, but also to the very notion of modern, enlightened, and humane government itself. That was first evident in the so-called war on terror waged by the United States and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan. An unintended effect of those wars—and others in the Horn of Africa, North Africa, and West Africa—has been the emergence of more extreme forms of terrorism. The most extreme by far has been the rise of ISIL,

the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Syria). This new form of barbarism reminds us of the basic values that states and the state system exist to defend. International relations is, of course, about power. But terrorism reveals that there is more to it than that. People expect states to uphold certain key values: security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare. States do not always defend them. Some states assault those values at certain times or in certain places. Hitler, the Japanese military dictatorship, and Stalin massively assaulted them during the Second World War. But the values remain. IR scholarship must focus on them. It is, therefore, ironic that ISIL called itself a 'state', while in fact it was—and remains—a non-state actor of a particularly violent and malevolent kind; an actor waging its terrorist war against the modern state system itself. That is indicated not least by the alarmed reaction to it of a great many states, both Western and non-Western, and by their determination to do whatever necessary to defeat it. This recent episode reveals, as clearly as any episode could, the values that are associated with the modern state and the state system and which they are prepared to defend, if they have to, by means of armed force.

This leads to the larger issue of whether the state system is worth upholding and defending or whether it ought to be replaced by another system. IR theories are not in agreement on this issue, but the discipline of IR is based on the conviction that sovereign states and their development are of crucial importance for understanding how basic values of human life are being, or not being, provided to people around the world.

The following chapters will introduce the theoretical traditions of IR in further detail. Whereas this chapter has concerned the actual development of states and the state system, the next chapter will focus on how IR as an academic discipline has evolved over time.

### \* Key points

- The main reason why we should study IR is the fact that the entire population of the world is living in independent states. Together, those states form a global state system.
- The core values that states are expected to uphold are security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare. Many states promote such values; some do not.
- Traditional or classical IR scholars generally hold a positive view of states as necessary and desirable. Revisionist scholars view them more negatively as problematical, even harmful.
- The system of sovereign states emerged in Europe at the start of the modern era, in the sixteenth century but its roots stretch deep into the Middle Ages. Modern political authority is centralized, residing in the government and the head of state.
- The state system was first European; now it is global. The global state system contains states of very different types: great powers and small states; strong, substantial states and weak quasi-states.

- There is a link between the expansion of the state system and the establishment of a world market and a global economy. Some developing countries have benefitted from integration into the global economy; others remain poor and underdeveloped.
- Economic globalization and other developments challenge the sovereign state. We cannot know for certain whether the state system is now becoming obsolete, or whether states will find ways of adapting to new challenges.
- States and the state system not only uphold certain values, they also embody them.

## ? Questions

- What is a state? Why do we have them? What is a state system?
- Why did the first state systems arise and where did this occur?
- Which role did the eleventh-century split between religious and secular power play in the story about state formation?
- When did independent states and the modern system of states emerge? What is the difference between a medieval and a modern system of political authority?
- What are the two different interpretations of the Peace of Westphalia?
- Why did the modern state and state system emerge in Europe and not somewhere else?
- We expect states to sustain a number of core values: security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare. Do states meet our expectations?
- Should we strive to preserve the system of sovereign states? Why or why not?
- Explain the main differences between strong, substantial states and weak quasi-states; great powers and small powers. Why is there such diversity in the state system?
- Does it make sense to view modern terrorism as an attack on the state system itself?
- What are some practical ways that states sustain the core value of security?

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## CHAPTER 2

# IR as an Academic Subject

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### Summary

This chapter shows how thinking about **international relations (IR)** has evolved since IR became an academic subject around the time of the First World War. Theoretical approaches are a product of their time: they address those problems of international relations that are seen as the most important ones in their day. The established traditions deal, nonetheless, with international problems that are of lasting significance: war and peace, conflict and cooperation, wealth and poverty, and development and underdevelopment. In this chapter, we shall focus on four established IR traditions. They are **realism**, **liberalism**, **International Society**, and **International Political Economy (IPE)**. We also introduce more recent, alternative approaches that challenge the established traditions, including **social constructivism** and **post-positivist approaches**. The new voices in IR include feminist theory, Green theory, and IR theories from the Global South.

## 2.1 Introduction

The traditional core of IR has to do with issues concerning the development and change of sovereign statehood in the context of the larger system or society of states. This focus on states and the relations of states helps explain why war and peace form a central problem of traditional IR theory. However, contemporary IR is concerned not only with political relations between states but also with a host of other subjects: economic interdependence, human rights, transnational corporations, international organizations, the environment, gender inequalities, economic development, terrorism, and so forth. For this reason, some scholars prefer the label 'International Studies' or 'World Politics'. We shall stay with the label 'International Relations' but we interpret it to cover the broad range of issues.

There are four major classical theoretical traditions in IR: realism, liberalism, International Society, and IPE. In addition, there is a more diverse group of alternative approaches which have gained prominence in recent decades. The most important of these are social constructivism and post-positivist approaches, an umbrella term for several different strands of theory. The main task of this book is to present and discuss all these schools of thought. In this chapter, we examine IR as an evolving academic subject. IR thinking has developed through distinct phases, characterized by specific debates between groups of scholars. At most times during the twentieth century, there has been a dominant way of thinking about IR and a major challenge to that way of thinking. Those debates and dialogues are the main subject of this chapter.

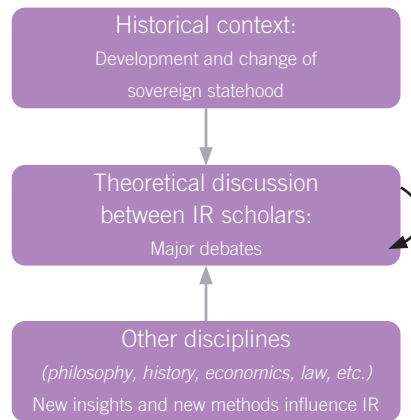
There are a great many different theories in IR. They can be classified in a number of ways; what we call a 'main theoretical tradition' is not an objective entity. If you put four IR theorists in a room you will easily get ten different ways of organizing theory, and there will also be disagreement about which theories are relevant in the first place! At the same time, we have to group theories into main categories. Without identifying main paths in the development of IR thinking, we are stuck with a large number of individual contributions, pointing in different and sometimes rather confusing directions. But you should always be wary of selections and classifications, including the ones offered in this book. They are analytical tools created to achieve overview and clarity; they are not objective truths that can be taken for granted (see Box 2.1).

Of course, IR thinking is influenced by other academic subjects, such as philosophy, history, law, sociology, and economics. IR thinking also responds to historical

### BOX 2.1 Key Arguments: IR theories as models

[T]he main schools of general theory of international relations are not proven in any scientific sense: rather they constitute ways of perceiving international relations, metaphors or models which appeal to their adherents because that is the way they prefer to view the world.

**Wilkinson (2007: 2)**

**FIGURE 2.1** The development of IR thinking

and contemporary developments in the real world. The two world wars, the Cold War between East and West, the emergence of close economic cooperation between Western states, and the persistent development gap between North and South are examples of real-world events and problems that stimulated IR scholarship in the twentieth century. And we can be certain that future events and episodes will provoke new IR thinking in the years to come: that is already evident with regard to the end of the Cold War, which has stimulated a variety of innovative IR thought in recent decades. The terrorist attacks that began on 11 September 2001 are another major challenge to IR thinking; the financial crisis that broke in 2008 and the current conflicts in the Middle East are yet other examples (see Figure 2.1). At the present time, the COVID-19 pandemic, the global refugee crisis, and the growth of socioeconomic inequalities, political populism, and nationalist politics challenge theorizing in IR.

There have been three major debates since IR became an academic subject at the end of the First World War, and we are now well into a fourth. The first major debate was between utopian liberalism and realism; the second between traditional approaches and **behaviouralism**; the third between neorealism/neoliberalism and neo-**Marxism**. The fourth debate is between established traditions and **post-positivist** alternatives. We shall review these major debates in this chapter because they provide us with a map of the way the academic subject of IR has developed over the past century. We need to become familiar with that map in order to comprehend IR as a dynamic academic subject that continues to evolve, and to see the directions of that continuing evolution of IR thought.

## 2.2 Utopian Liberalism: The Early Study of IR

The decisive push to set up a separate academic subject of IR was occasioned by the First World War (1914–18), which brought millions of casualties, large-scale physical destruction of large areas of continental Europe, and numerous political and military upheavals even after the main fighting had ended in November 1918. It was driven by



a widely felt determination never to allow human suffering on such a scale to happen again.

Why was it that the war began in the first place? And why did Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria, Turkey, and other powers persist in waging war in the face of the slaughter of millions of young men and with diminishing chances of gaining anything of real value from the conflict? The answers that the new discipline of IR came up with were profoundly influenced by liberal ideas. For liberal thinkers, the First World War was in no small measure attributable to the egoistic and short-sighted calculations and miscalculations of autocratic leaders in the heavily militarized countries involved, especially Germany and Austria. Unrestrained by democratic institutions and under pressure from their generals, these leaders were inclined to take the fatal decisions that led their countries into war (see Box 2.2).

Why was early academic IR influenced by liberalism? That is a big question, but there are a few important points that we should keep in mind in seeking an answer. The United States was eventually drawn into the war in 1917. Its military intervention decisively determined the outcome of the war: it guaranteed victory for the democratic allies (the US, Britain, France) and defeat for the autocratic central powers (Germany, Austria, Turkey). At that time, the United States had a president, Woodrow Wilson, who had been a university professor of political science and who saw it as his main mission to bring liberal democratic values to Europe and to the rest of the world. Only in that way, he believed, could another great war be prevented. In short, the liberal way of thinking had a solid political backing from the most powerful state in the international system at the time. Academic IR developed first and most strongly in the two leading liberal-democratic states: the United States and Great Britain. Liberal thinkers had some clear ideas and strong beliefs about how to avoid major disasters in the future, e.g., by reforming the international system, and also by reforming the domestic structures of autocratic countries.

### BOX 2.2 Key Developments: Leadership misperceptions and war

It is my conviction that during the descent into the abyss, the perceptions of statesmen and generals were absolutely crucial. All the participants suffered from greater or lesser distortions in their images of themselves. They tended to see themselves as honorable, virtuous, and pure, and the adversary as diabolical. All the nations on the brink of the disaster expected the worst from their potential adversaries. They saw their own options as limited by necessity or 'fate', whereas those of the adversary were characterized by many choices. Everywhere, there was a total absence of empathy; no one could see the situation from another point of view. The character of each of the leaders was badly flawed by arrogance, stupidity, carelessness, or weakness.

**Stoessinger (2010: 21–3)**

President Wilson's vision of making the world 'safe for democracy' had wide appeal for ordinary people (see Box 2.3). It has been said that in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, the popular alternatives for Europe were 'Wilson or Lenin' (Ziblatt 2017: 8). Wilson's ideas were formulated in a fourteen-point programme delivered in an address to Congress in January 1918, and he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919. His ideas influenced the Paris Peace Conference, which followed the end of hostilities and tried to institute a new international order based on liberal ideas.

Two major points in Wilson's ideas for a more peaceful world deserve special emphasis (Brown and Ainley 2009). The first concerns his promotion of democracy and self-determination. Behind this point is the liberal conviction that democratic governments do not and will not go to war against each other. It was Wilson's hope that the growth of liberal democracy in Europe would put an end to autocratic and warlike leaders and put peaceful governments in their place. Liberal democracy should therefore be strongly encouraged. The second major point in Wilson's programme concerned the creation of an international organization that would put relations between states on a firmer institutional foundation than in the past. In essence, that was Wilson's concept of the League of Nations, which was instituted by the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The idea that international institutions can promote peaceful cooperation among states is a basic element of liberal thinking; so is the notion about a relationship between liberal democracy and peace. We return to both ideas in Chapter 4.

Wilsonian idealism can be summarized as follows. It is the conviction that, through a rational and intelligently designed international organization, it should be possible to put an end to war and to achieve more or less permanent peace. The claim is not that it will be possible to do away with states and statespeople, foreign ministries, armed forces, and other agents and instruments of international conflict. Rather, the claim is that it is possible to tame states and statespeople by subjecting them to the appropriate international organizations, institutions, and laws. The argument liberal idealists make is that traditional

### BOX 2.3 Key Quotes: Making the world safe for democracy

We are glad now that we see the facts with no veil of false pretense about them, to fight thus for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples, the German peoples included: for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience. The world must be made safe for democracy. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the right of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

**Woodrow Wilson, from 'Address to Congress Asking for Declaration of War', 1917, quoted from Vasquez (1996: 35–40)**

power politics—so-called ‘Realpolitik’—is a ‘jungle’, so to speak, where dangerous beasts roam and the strong and cunning rule; whereas under the League of Nations the beasts are put into cages reinforced by the restraints of international organization; i.e., into a kind of ‘zoo’. Wilson’s liberal faith that an international organization could be created that would guarantee permanent peace is clearly reminiscent of the thought of the most famous classical liberal IR theorist: Immanuel Kant in his pamphlet *Perpetual Peace* (1795).

Norman Angell is another prominent liberal idealist of the same era. In 1909, Angell published a book entitled *The Great Illusion*. Angell argues that in modern times territorial conquest is extremely expensive and politically divisive because it severely disrupts international commerce; war therefore no longer serves profitable purposes. The general argument set forth by Angell is a forerunner of later liberal thinking about modernization and economic interdependence. Modernization demands that states have a growing need of things ‘from “outside”—credit, or inventions, or markets or materials not contained in sufficient quantity in the country itself’ (Navari 1989: 345). Rising interdependence, in turn, effects a change in relations between states. War and the use of force become of decreasing importance, and international law develops in response to the need for a framework to regulate high levels of interdependence. In sum, modernization and interdependence involve a process of change and progress which renders war and the use of force increasingly obsolete.

The thinking of Wilson and Angell is based on a liberal view of human beings and human society: human beings are rational, and when they apply reason to international relations, they can set up organizations for the benefit of all. Public opinion is a constructive force; removing secret diplomacy in dealings between states and, instead, opening diplomacy to public scrutiny ensures that agreements will be sensible and fair. These ideas had some success in the 1920s; the League of Nations was indeed established and the great powers took some further steps to assure each other of their peaceful intentions. The high point of these efforts came with the Kellogg–Briand Pact of 1928, which practically all countries signed. The pact was an international agreement to abolish war; only in extreme cases of self-defence could war be justified. In short, liberal ideas dominated in the first phase of academic IR. Indeed, the liberal ideas had already been influential before the First World War, as demonstrated by the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 (see Box 2.4).

Why is it, then, that we tend to refer to such ideas by the somewhat pejorative term of ‘utopian liberalism’, indicating that these liberal arguments were little more than wishful thinking? One plausible answer is to be found in the political and economic

#### BOX 2.4 Key Developments: The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907

The Hague Conventions were two international peace treaties made at conferences in the Hague in 1899 and 1907 that were attended by all major powers. The Hague Conventions dealt with rules for warfare but also included negotiations about disarmament and an attempt to set up a court of arbitration that would allow countries to solve disagreements in a peaceful way. A third conference was to take place in 1914 (it was later rescheduled to 1915) but the outbreak of the First World War put a stop to it.

developments of the 1920s and 1930s. Liberal democracy suffered hard blows with the growth of fascist dictatorship in Italy and Spain, and Nazism in Germany. Authoritarianism also increased in many of the new states of Central and Eastern Europe—for example, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia—that were brought into existence as a result of the First World War and the Paris Peace Conference and were supposed to become democracies. Thus, Wilson's hopes for the spread of democratic civilization were shattered. In many cases, what actually happened was the spread of the very sort of state that he believed provoked war: autocratic, authoritarian, and militaristic states. At the same time, liberal states themselves were not democratic role models in every way: several of them held on to vast empires, with colonies kept under coercive control (Long and Schmidt 2005). Woodrow Wilson himself was a staunch defender of racial hierarchy in the United States and he did not press for self-determination for non-European peoples (Skowronek 2006).

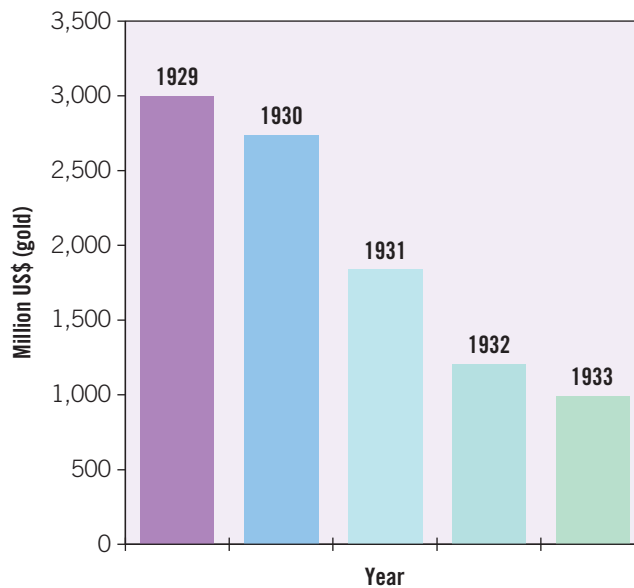
The League of Nations never became the strong international organization that liberals hoped would restrain powerful and aggressively disposed states. Germany and Russia initially failed to sign the Versailles Peace Treaty, and their relationship to the League was always strained. Germany joined the League in 1926 but left in 1933. Japan also left at that time, while embarking on war in Manchuria. Russia finally joined in 1934, but was expelled in 1940 because of the war with Finland. By that time the League was effectively dead. Although Britain and France were members from the start, they never regarded the League as an important institution and refused to shape their foreign policies with League criteria in mind. Most devastating, however, was the refusal of the United States Senate to ratify the covenant of the League (see Box 2.5). Isolationism had a long tradition in US foreign policy, and many American politicians were isolationists even if President Wilson was not; they did not want to involve their country in the murky affairs of Europe. So, much to Wilson's chagrin, the strongest state in the international system—his own—did not join the League. With a number of states outside the

### BOX 2.5 Key Developments: The League of Nations

The League of Nations (1920–46) contained three main organs: the Council (fifteen members including France, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union as permanent members) which met three times a year; the Assembly (all members) which met annually, and a Secretariat. All decisions had to be by unanimous vote. The underlying philosophy of the League was the principle of collective security which meant that the international community had a duty to intervene in international conflicts: it also meant that parties to a dispute should submit their grievances to the League. The centre-piece of the [League] Covenant was Article 16, which empowered the League to institute economic or military sanctions against a recalcitrant state. In essence, though, it was left to each member to decide whether or not a breach of the Covenant had occurred and so whether or not to apply sanctions.

**Evans and Newnham (1992: 176)**

**FIGURE 2.2** Contraction of world trade: Total imports of seventy-five countries 1929–33 (million gold US\$)



Based on Kindleberger (1973: 280)

League, including the most important, and with the two major powers inside the organization lacking any real commitment to it, the League never achieved the central position marked out for it in Wilson's blueprint.

Norman Angell's high hopes for a smooth process of modernization and interdependence also foundered on the harsh realities of the 1930s. The Wall Street crash of October 1929 marked the beginning of a severe economic crisis in Western countries that would last until the Second World War and would involve hard measures of economic protectionism. World trade shrank dramatically (see Figure 2.2), and industrial production in developed countries declined rapidly. In July 1932—at the trough of the Great Depression—American production of pig iron reached its lowest level since 1896 (Galbraith 1988: 142). In ironic contrast to Angell's vision, it was each country for itself, each country trying as best it could to look after its own interests, if necessary to the detriment of others—the 'jungle' rather than the 'zoo'. The historical stage was being set for a less hopeful and more pessimistic understanding of international relations.

## 2.3 Realism and the Twenty Years' Crisis

Liberal idealism was not a good intellectual guide to international relations in the 1930s. Interdependence did not produce peaceful cooperation; the League of Nations was helpless in the face of the expansionist power politics conducted by the authoritarian regimes in Germany, Italy, and Japan. These developments put Wilsonianism on

the defensive. Already under the peace negotiations at Versailles in 1919, the French premier George Clemenceau is supposed to have ridiculed Wilson's Fourteen Points by pointing out that even God Almighty could do with ten. But now Academic IR also began to speak the classical realist language of Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes in which the grammar and the vocabulary of power were central.

The most comprehensive and penetrating critique of liberal idealism was that of E. H. Carr, a British IR scholar. In *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1964 [1939]) Carr argued that liberal IR thinkers profoundly misread the facts of history and misunderstood the nature of international relations. They erroneously believed that such relations could be based on a harmony of interest between countries and people. According to Carr, the correct starting point is the opposite one: we should assume that there are profound conflicts of interest both between countries and between people. Some people and some countries are better off than others. They will attempt to preserve and defend their privileged position. The underdogs, the 'have-nots', will struggle to change that situation. International relations is, in a basic sense, about the struggle between such conflicting interests and desires. That is why IR is far more about conflict than about cooperation. Carr astutely labelled the liberal position 'utopian' as a contrast to his own position, which he labelled 'realist', thus implying that his approach was the more sober and correct analysis of international relations.

The other significant realist statement from this period was produced by a German scholar who fled to the United States in the 1930s to escape from the Nazi regime in Germany: Hans J. Morgenthau. More than any other European émigré scholar, Morgenthau brought realism to the US, and with great success. His *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, first published in 1948, was for several decades the most influential American book on IR (Morgenthau 1960).

For Morgenthau, human nature was at the base of international relations. And humans were self-interested and power-seeking and that could easily result in aggression. In the late 1930s, it was not difficult to find evidence to support such a view. Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and Imperial Japan pursued blatantly aggressive foreign policies aimed at conflict, not cooperation. Armed struggle for the creation of *Lebensraum*, of a larger and stronger Germany, was at the core of Hitler's political programme. Furthermore, and ironically from a liberal perspective, both Hitler and Mussolini enjoyed widespread popular support, despite the fact that they were autocratic and even tyrannical leaders.

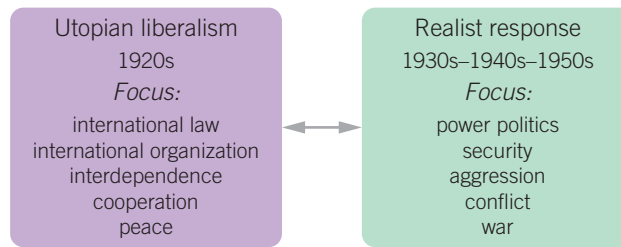
Why should international relations be egoistic and aggressive? Observing the growth of fascism in the 1930s, Einstein wrote to Freud that there must be 'a human lust for hatred and destruction' (Ebenstein 1951: 802–4). Freud confirmed that such an aggressive impulse did indeed exist, and he remained deeply sceptical about the possibilities of taming it. The realist theologian Reinhold Niebuhr drew on Christianity to explain this. According to the Bible, humans have been endowed with original sin and a temptation for evil ever since Adam and Eve were thrown out of Paradise. The first murder by man is Cain's killing of his brother Abel out of pure envy. Realists such as Carr and Morgenthau adopted Niebuhr's view of humans, shorn of its theological basis (Smith 1986: 129–30). Whether the source was religious or found in psychology, the common starting point for realist analysis is this: Human nature is plain bad (Waltz 1959: 27).

The second major element in the realist view concerns the nature of international relations. 'International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim' (Morgenthau 1960: 29). There is no world government. On the contrary, there is a system of sovereign and armed states facing each other. World politics is an international anarchy. The 1930s and 1940s appeared to confirm this proposition. International relations was a struggle for power and for survival. The quest for power certainly characterized the foreign policies of Germany, Italy, and Japan. The same struggle, in response, applied to the Allied side during the Second World War. Britain, France, and the United States were the 'haves' in Carr's terms, the 'status quo' powers who wanted to hold on to what they already had, and Germany, Italy, and Japan were the 'have-nots', who wanted to change the status quo. So it was only natural, according to realist thinking, that the 'have-nots' would try and redress the international balance through the use of force.

Following realist analysis, the appropriate response to such attempts is two-pronged. On the one hand, rising power should be recognized and given its due, if necessary in the form of political and territorial concessions. On the other hand, it should be met by countervailing power and the intelligent utilization of that power to provide for national defence and to deter potential aggressors. In other words, it was essential to maintain an effective balance of power as the only way to preserve peace and prevent war. The League of Nations failed to constrain Germany. It took another world war, millions of casualties, heroic sacrifice, and vast material resources finally to defeat the challenges from Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan. All of that might have been avoided if a realistic foreign policy based on the principle of recognizing and accommodating power when prudent and meeting it with countervailing power when necessary had been followed by Britain, France, and the United States right from the start of Germany's, Italy's, and Japan's sabre-rattling.

The third major component in the realist view is a cyclical view of history. Contrary to the optimistic liberal view that qualitative change for the better is possible, realism stresses continuity and repetition. Each new generation tends to make the same sort of mistakes as previous generations. Any change in this situation is highly unlikely. As long as sovereign states are the dominant form of political organization, power politics will continue and states will have to look after their security and prepare for war. In other words, the Second World War was no extraordinary event; neither was the First World War. Sovereign states can live in peace with each other for long periods when there is a stable balance of power. But every now and then, that precarious balance will break down and war is likely to follow. There can, of course, be many different causes of such breakdown. Some realist scholars think that the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 contained the seeds of the Second World War because of the harsh conditions that the peace treaty imposed on Germany. But domestic developments in Germany, the emergence of Hitler, and many other factors are also relevant in accounting for that war.

In sum, the classical realism of Carr and Morgenthau combines a pessimistic view of human nature with a notion of power politics between states which exist in an international anarchy. They see no prospects of change in that situation; for classical realists, independent states in an anarchic international system are a permanent feature of

**FIGURE 2.3** First major debate in IR

international relations. The classical realist analysis appeared to capture the essentials of European politics in the 1930s and world politics in the 1940s far better than liberal optimism. When international relations took the shape of an East–West confrontation, or Cold War, after 1947, realism again appeared to be the best approach for making sense of what was going on.

The utopian liberalism of the 1920s and the realism of the 1930s–1950s represent the two contending positions in the first major debate in IR (see Figure 2.3). The first major debate was clearly won by Carr, Morgenthau, and the other realist thinkers. Realism became the dominant way of thinking about international relations, not only among scholars, but also among politicians and diplomats. Yet it is important to emphasize that liberalism did not disappear. Many liberals conceded that realism was the better guide to international relations in the 1930s and 1940s, but they saw this as an extreme and abnormal historical period. Liberals, of course, rejected the deeply pessimistic realist idea that humans were ‘plain bad’ (Wight 1991: 25) and they had some strong counter-arguments to that effect, as we shall see in Chapter 4. Finally, the post-war period was not only about a struggle for power and survival between the United States and the Soviet Union and their political–military alliances. It was also about cooperation and international institutions, such as the United Nations and its many special organizations. Although realism had won the first debate, there were still competing theories in the discipline that refused to accept permanent defeat.

## 2.4 The Voice of Behaviouralism in IR

The second major debate in IR concerns methodology. In order to understand how that debate emerged, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that the first generations of IR scholars were trained as historians or academic lawyers, or were former diplomats or journalists. They often brought a humanistic and historical approach to the study of IR. This approach is rooted in philosophy, history, and law, and is characterized ‘above all by explicit reliance upon the exercise of judgment’ (Bull 1969). Locating judgement at the heart of international theory serves to emphasize the normative character of the subject which at its core involves some profoundly difficult moral questions that neither politicians nor diplomats nor anyone else who is involved can escape, such as the deployment of nuclear weapons and their justified uses, military intervention in independent



**BOX 2.6** Key Concepts: Behaviouralist science in brief

Once the investigator has mastered the existing knowledge, and has organized it for his purposes, he pleads a 'meaningful ignorance': 'Here is what I know; what do I not know that is worth knowing?' Once an area has been selected for investigation, the questions should be posed as clearly as possible, and it is here that quantification can prove useful, provided that mathematical tools are combined with carefully constructed taxonomic schemes. Surveying the field of international relations, or any sector of it, we see many disparate elements . . . wondering whether there may be any significant relationships between A and B, or between B and C. By a process which we are compelled to call 'intuition' . . . we perceive a possible correlation, hitherto unsuspected or not firmly known, between two or more elements. At this point, we have the ingredients of a hypothesis which can be expressed in measurable referents, and which, if validated, would be both explanatory and predictive.

**Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1971: 36–7)**

states, the upholding or not of empires, and so forth. This way of studying IR is usually referred to as the traditional, or classical, approach.

After the Second World War, the academic discipline of IR expanded rapidly; particularly in the United States, where government agencies and private foundations were willing to support 'scientific' IR research which they could argue to be in the national interest. That support produced a new generation of IR scholars who adopted a rigorous methodological approach. They were usually trained in political science, economics, or other social sciences, rather than diplomatic history, international law, or political philosophy. These new IR scholars thus had a very different academic background and equally different ideas concerning how IR should be studied. These new ideas came to be summarized under the term 'behaviouralism', which signified not so much a new theory as a novel methodology that endeavoured to be 'scientific' in the natural-science meaning of that term (see Box 2.6).

Just as scholars of science are able to formulate objective and verifiable 'laws' to explain the physical world, the ambition of behaviourists in IR is to do the same for the world of international relations. The main task is to collect empirical data about international relations, preferably large amounts of data, which can then be used for measurement, classification, generalization, and, ultimately, the validation of hypotheses; i.e., scientifically explained patterns of behaviour. Behaviouralism is more interested in observable facts and measurable data, in precise calculation, and the collection of data in order to find recurring behavioural patterns, the 'laws' of international relations. According to behaviourists, facts are separate from values. Unlike facts, values cannot be explained scientifically. The behaviourists were therefore inclined to study facts, and first and foremost the observable behaviour of human beings, while ignoring values. The scientific procedure that behaviourists support is laid out in Box 2.7.

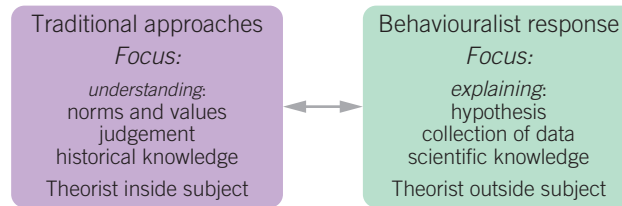
### BOX 2.7 Key Arguments: The scientific procedure of behaviouralists

The hypothesis must be validated through testing. This demands the construction of a verifying experiment or the gathering of empirical data in other ways . . . The results of the data-gathering effort are carefully observed, recorded and analyzed, after which the hypothesis is discarded, modified, reformulated or confirmed. Findings are published and others are invited to duplicate this knowledge-discovering adventure, and to confirm or deny. This, very roughly, is what we usually mean by ‘the scientific method’.

**Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1971: 37)**

The two methodological approaches to IR briefly described in the previous section, the traditional and the behavioural, are clearly very different. The traditional approach is a holistic one that accepts the complexity of the human world, sees international relations as part of the human world, and seeks to understand it in a humanistic way by getting *inside* it. That involves imaginatively entering into the role of statespeople, attempting to understand the moral dilemmas in their foreign policies, and appreciating the basic values involved, such as security, order, freedom, and justice. To approach IR in that traditional way involves the scholar in understanding the history and practice of diplomacy, the history and role of international law, the political theory of the sovereign state, and so forth. IR is in that view a broadly humanistic subject; it is not and could never be a strictly scientific or narrowly technical subject. A good example is the work of E.H. Carr, which was based on a rejection of the notion that IR insights could be subjected to scientific testing against empirical observations. Indeed, Carr’s work is probably best situated in the reflexivist (or post-positivist) tradition we investigate later in the book (Jackson 2016: 207).

The other approach, behaviouralism, has no place for morality or ethics in the study of IR because that involves values, and values cannot be studied objectively; i.e., scientifically. Behaviouralism raises a fundamental question which continues to be discussed today: can we formulate scientific laws about international relations (and about the social world, the world of human relations, in general)? Critics emphasize what they see as a major mistake in that method: the mistake of treating human relations as an external phenomenon in the same general category as nature so that the theorist stands *outside* the subject—like an anatomist dissecting a cadaver. The anti-behaviouralists hold that the theorist of human affairs is a human being who can never divorce themselves completely from human relations: they are always *inside* the subject (Hollis and Smith 1990; Jackson 2000; for a general appraisal, see Jackson 2016). Some scholars attempt to reconcile these approaches: they seek to be historically conscious about IR as a sphere of human relations while also trying to come up with general models that seek to explain and not merely understand world politics. Morgenthau might be an example of that. In studying the moral dilemmas of foreign policy, he is in the traditionalist camp; yet he also sets forth general ‘laws of politics’ which are supposed to apply at all times in all places, and that would appear to put him in the behaviouralist camp (see Chapter 3).

**FIGURE 2.4** Second major debate in IR

After a few years of vigorous controversy, the second great debate (see Figure 2.4) petered out. Though it would be wrong to say that the behaviouralists won the second major debate in IR outright, it is clear that they placed the traditionalists on the defensive. That was largely because of the domination of the discipline after the Second World War by US scholars, the vast majority of whom supported the quantitative, scientific ambitions of behaviouralism (Jackson 2016: 60). They also led the way in setting a research agenda focused on the role of the two superpowers, especially the United States, in the international system. That paved the way to new formulations of both realism and liberalism that were heavily influenced by behaviouralist methodologies. These new formulations—**neorealism** and **neoliberalism**—led to a replay of the first major debate under new historical and methodological conditions.

## 2.5 Neoliberalism: Institutions and Interdependence

Realism, having won the first major debate, remained the dominant theoretical approach in IR. The second debate, about methodology, did not immediately change that situation. After 1945, the centre of gravity in international relations was the Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. The East–West rivalry lent itself easily to a realist interpretation of the world.

Yet during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, a good deal of international relations concerned trade and investment, travel and communication, and similar issues which were especially prevalent in the relations between the liberal democracies of the West (see Table 2.1). Those relations provided the basis for a new attempt by liberals to formulate an alternative to realist thinking that would avoid the utopian excesses of earlier liberalism. We shall use the label ‘neoliberalism’ for that renewed liberal approach. Neoliberals share old liberal ideas about the possibility of progress and change, but they repudiate idealism. Most of them also strive to formulate theories and apply new methods which are scientific. In short, the debate between liberalism and realism continued, but it was now coloured by the post-1945 international setting and the behaviouralist methodological persuasion.

In the 1950s, a process of regional integration was getting under way in Western Europe which caught the attention and imagination of neoliberals. By ‘integration’ we refer to a particularly intensive form of international cooperation. Early theorists of integration studied how certain functional activities across borders (trade, investment, etc.) offered mutually advantageous long-term cooperation. Other neoliberal

theorists studied how integration fed on itself: cooperation in one transactional area paved the way for cooperation in other areas (Haas 1958; Keohane and Nye 1975). During the 1950s and 1960s, Western Europe and Japan developed mass-consumption welfare states, as the United States had done already before the war. That development entailed a higher level of trade, communication, cultural exchange, and other relations and transactions across borders.

This provides the basis for *sociological liberalism*, a strand of neoliberal thinking which emphasizes the impact of these expanding cross-border activities. In the 1950s, Karl Deutsch and his associates argued that such interconnecting activities helped create common values and identities among people from different states and paved the way for peaceful, cooperative relations by making war increasingly costly and thus more unlikely. They also tried to measure the integration phenomenon scientifically (Deutsch et al. 1957).

In the 1970s, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye further developed such ideas. They argued that relationships between Western states (including Japan) are characterized by complex interdependence: there are many forms of connections between societies in addition to the political relations of governments, including transnational links between business corporations. There is also an ‘absence of hierarchy among issues’; i.e., military security does not dominate the agenda any more. Military force is no longer used as an instrument of foreign policy (Keohane and Nye 1977: 25). Complex interdependence portrays a situation that is radically different from the realist picture of international relations. In Western democracies, there are other actors besides states, and violent conflict clearly is not on their international agenda. We can call this form of neoliberalism *interdependence liberalism*. Keohane and Nye (1977) are among the main contributors to this line of thinking.

When there is a high degree of interdependence, states will often set up international institutions to deal with common problems. Institutions promote cooperation across international boundaries by providing information and reducing costs. Institutions can be formal international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the European Union (EU) or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); or they can be less formal sets of agreements (often called regimes) which deal

**TABLE 2.1** OECD countries, total import/export, percentage of gross domestic product (GDP)

	1960 %	1970 %	1980 %	2000 %	2015 %	2019 %
Imports	11	13	19	23	28	30
Exports	11	13	18	22	29	31

Based on World Bank statistics (CC BY 4.0)

[http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.ZS?locations=OE&name\\_desc=false&view=chart](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.ZS?locations=OE&name_desc=false&view=chart)

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.IMP.GNFS.ZS?locations=OE&view=chart>

TABLE 2.2 Variations of liberalism

THEORY	FOCUS
• Sociological liberalism	Cross-border flows, common values
• Interdependence liberalism	Transactions stimulate cooperation
• Institutional liberalism	International institutions, regimes
• Republican liberalism	Liberal democracies living in peace with each other

with common activities or issues, such as agreements about shipping, aviation, communication, or the environment. We can call this form of neoliberalism *institutional liberalism*. Oran Young (1986) and Robert Keohane (1989) are influential scholars in this area.

The fourth and final strand of neoliberalism—*republican liberalism*—picks up on a theme developed in earlier liberal thinking. It is the idea that liberal democracies enhance peace because they do not go to war against each other. It has been strongly influenced by the rapid spread of democratization in the world after the end of the Cold War, especially in the former Soviet satellite countries in Eastern Europe. An influential version of the theory of democratic peace was set forth by Michael Doyle (1983). Doyle finds that the democratic peace is based on three pillars: the first is peaceful conflict resolution between democratic states; the second is common values among democratic states—a common moral foundation; the final pillar is economic cooperation among democracies. Republican liberals are generally optimistic that there will be a steadily expanding ‘Zone of Peace’ among liberal democracies even though there may also be occasional setbacks.

These different strands of neoliberalism are mutually supportive in providing an overall consistent argument for more peaceful and cooperative international relations (see Table 2.2). They consequently stand as a challenge to the realist analysis of IR. In the 1970s, there was a general feeling among IR scholars that neoliberalism was on the way to becoming the dominant theoretical approach in the discipline. But a reformulation of realism by Kenneth Waltz (1979) once again tipped the balance towards realism. Neoliberal thinking could make convincing reference to relations between industrialized liberal democracies to argue its case about a more cooperative and interdependent world. But the East–West confrontation remained a stubborn feature of international relations in the 1970s and 1980s. The new reflections on realism took their cue from that historical fact.

## 2.6 Neorealism: Bipolarity and Confrontation

Kenneth Waltz broke new ground in his book *Theory of International Politics* (1979), which sets forth a substantially different realist theory inspired by theoretical insights in microeconomics. His theory is most often referred to as ‘neorealism’, and we shall employ that label. Waltz attempts to formulate ‘law-like statements’ about international

relations based solely on the systemic relations in the state system. He thus departs sharply from classical realism in showing virtually no interest in the **ethics of statecraft** or the moral dilemmas of foreign policy—concerns that are strongly evident in the realist writings of Morgenthau.

Waltz's focus is on the 'structure' of the international system and the consequences of that structure for international relations. The concept of structure is defined as follows. First, Waltz notes that the international system is anarchical; there is no worldwide government. Second, the international system is composed of like units: every state, small or large, has to perform a similar set of government functions such as national defence, tax collection, and economic regulation. However, there is one respect in which states are different and often very different: in their power, what Waltz calls their relative capabilities. Waltz thus draws a very parsimonious and abstract picture of the international system with very few elements. International relations is an anarchy composed of states that vary in only one important respect: their relative power. Anarchy is likely to endure, according to Waltz, because states want to preserve their autonomy.

The international system that came into existence after the Second World War was dominated by two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union; i.e., it was a bipolar system. The demise of the Soviet Union has resulted in a different system with several great powers but with the United States as predominant; i.e., it is moving towards a multipolar system. Waltz does not claim that these few pieces of information about the structure of the international system can explain everything about international politics. But he believes that they can explain 'a few big and important things' (Waltz 1986: 322–47). What are they? First, great powers will always tend to balance each other. With the Soviet Union gone, the United States dominates the system. But 'balance-of-power theory leads one to predict that other countries . . . will try to bring American power into balance' (Waltz 1993: 52). Second, smaller and weaker states will have a tendency to align themselves with great powers in order to preserve their maximum autonomy. In making this argument, Waltz departs sharply from the classical realist argument based on human nature viewed as 'plain bad' and thus leading to conflict and confrontation. He terms these 'reductionist' explanations which cannot explain anything on their own. For Waltz, states are power-seeking and security-conscious not because of human nature but rather because the structure of the international system compels them to be that way.

This last point is also important because it is the basis for neorealism's counter-attack against the neoliberals. Neorealists do not deny all possibilities for cooperation among states. But they maintain that cooperating states will always strive to maximize their relative power and preserve their autonomy. In other words, just because there is cooperation, as, for example, in relations between industrialized liberal democracies (e.g., between the United States and Japan), it does not mean that the neoliberal view has been vindicated. We return to the details of this debate in Chapter 4. Here we merely draw attention to the fact that in the 1980s, neorealism succeeded in putting neoliberalism on the defensive. Waltz's theoretical arguments were significant in this respect. But historical events also played an important role. In the 1980s the confrontation between

the United States and the Soviet Union reached a new level. US President Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire', and in that hostile international climate, the arms race between the superpowers was sharply intensified.

During the 1980s, some neorealists and neoliberals came close to sharing a common analytical starting point that is basically neorealist in character; i.e., states are the main actors in what is still an international anarchy and they constantly look after their own best interests (Baldwin 1993). Neoliberals still argued that institutions, interdependence, and democracy led to more thoroughgoing cooperation than is predicted by neorealists. But many current versions of neorealism and neoliberalism were no longer diametrically opposed. In methodological terms there was even more common ground between neorealists and neoliberals. Both strongly supported the scientific project launched by the behaviouralists, even though republican liberals were a partial exception in that regard. This was somewhat paradoxical as Waltz (1979: Ch. 1), whose intervention had paved the way for this rapprochement, had expressly disputed the behaviouralist notion that theories could be tested up against empirical observations (Wæver 2009; Jackson 2016: 123–4). We return to the theoretical and methodological nuances within neorealism in Chapter 3.

As indicated earlier, the debate between neorealism and neoliberalism can be seen as a continuation of the first major debate in IR. But unlike the earlier debate, this one resulted in most neoliberals accepting most of the neorealist assumptions as starting points for analysis. Robert Keohane (1993; Keohane and Martin 1995) attempted to formulate a synthesis of neorealism and neoliberalism coming from the neoliberal side. Barry Buzan et al. (1993) made a similar attempt coming from the neorealist side. However, there is still no complete synthesis between the two traditions. Some neorealists (e.g., Mearsheimer 1993, 1995b, 2019) and neoliberals (e.g., Rosenau 1990; Moravcsik 1997) are far from reconciled to each other and keep arguing exclusively in favour of their side of the debate. The debate is, therefore, a continuing one.

## 2.7 International Society: The English School

The behaviouralist challenge was most strongly felt among IR scholars in the United States. The neorealist and neoliberal acceptance of that challenge also came predominantly from the American academic community. As indicated earlier, during the 1950s and 1960s, American scholarship completely dominated the developing but still youthful IR discipline. Stanley Hoffmann made the point that the discipline of IR was 'born and raised in America', and he analysed the profound consequences of that fact for thinking and theorizing in IR (Hoffmann 1977: 41–59).

However, in the United Kingdom, a school of IR had existed throughout the period of the Cold War which was different in two major ways. It rejected the behaviouralist challenge and emphasized the traditional approach based on human understanding, judgement, norms, and history. It also rejected any firm distinction between a strict realist and a strict liberal view of international relations. The IR school to which we refer is sometimes called 'the English School'. But that name is far too narrow: it overlooks the fact that several of its leading figures were not English and many were not even from the

United Kingdom; rather, they were from Australia, Canada, and South Africa. For that reason, we shall use its other name: *International Society*. Two leading International Society theorists of the twentieth century are Martin Wight and Hedley Bull.

International Society theorists recognize the importance of power in international affairs. They also focus on the state and the state system. But they reject the narrow realist view that world politics is a Hobbesian state of nature in which there are no international norms at all. They view the state as the combination of a *Machtstaat* (power state) and a *Rechtsstaat* (constitutional state): power and law are both important features of international relations. It is true that there is an international anarchy in the sense that there is no world government. But international anarchy is a social and not an anti-social condition; i.e., world politics—at least in the present age—is an ‘anarchical society’ (Bull 1995) (see Box 2.8). International Society theorists also recognize the importance of the individual, and some of them argue that individuals are more important than states. Unlike many contemporary liberals, however, International Society theorists have traditionally regarded IGOs and NGOs (intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations) as marginal rather than central features of world politics. They emphasize the relations of states and they play down the importance of transnational relations. Even the United Nations is seen as a ‘pseudo-institution’ which pales in significance next to the real institutions of world politics, which include the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, and war (Bull 1977: xiv).

International Society theorists find that realists are correct in pointing to the importance of power and national interest. But if we push the realist view to its logical conclusion, states would always be preoccupied with playing the tough game of power politics; in a pure anarchy, there can be no mutual trust. That view is clearly misleading; there is warfare, but states are not continually preoccupied with each other’s power, nor do they conceive of that power exclusively as a threat. On the other hand, if we take the liberal idealist view to the extreme, it means that all relations between states are governed by common rules in a perfect world of mutual respect and the rule of law. That view too is clearly misleading. Of course, there are common rules and norms that most states can be expected to observe most of the time; in that sense, relations between states constitute an international society. But these rules and norms cannot by themselves

### BOX 2.8 Key Concepts: International Society

A *society of states* (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions. My contention is that the element of a society has always been present, and remains present, in the modern international system.

**Bull (1995: 13, 39)**



guarantee international harmony and cooperation; power and the balance of power still remain very important in the anarchical society.

The United Nations system demonstrates how both elements—power and law—are simultaneously present in international society. The Security Council is set up according to the reality of unequal power among states. The great powers (the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France) are the only permanent members with the authority to veto decisions. That simply recognizes the reality of unequal power in world politics. The great powers have a *de facto* veto anyway: it would be very difficult to force them to do anything that they were not prepared to do. That is the ‘realist power and inequality element’ in international society. The General Assembly—by contrast with the Security Council—is set up according to the principle of international equality: every member state is legally equal to every other state; each state has one vote, and the majority rather than the most powerful prevails. That is the rationalist ‘common rules and norms’ element in international society. Finally, the UN also provides evidence of the importance of individuals in international affairs. The UN has promoted the international law of human rights, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Today there is an elaborate structure of humanitarian law which defines the basic civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights that are intended to promote an acceptable standard of human existence in the contemporary world. That is the cosmopolitan or solidarist element of international society.

For International Society theorists, the study of international relations is not about singling out one of these elements and disregarding the others. They do not seek to make and test hypotheses with the aim of constructing scientific laws of IR; rather, they are trying to understand and interpret international relations. International Society theorists thus take a broader historical, legal, and philosophical approach to international relations. IR is about discerning and exploring the complex presence of all these elements and the normative problems they present to state leaders. Power and national interests matter; so do common norms and institutions. States are important, but so are human beings. Statesmen and stateswomen have a national responsibility to their own nation and its citizens; they have an international responsibility to observe and follow international law and respect the rights of other states; and they have a humanitarian responsibility to defend human rights around the world. But, as the crises in the Darfur region of Sudan (2003–9) and elsewhere clearly demonstrated, carrying out these responsibilities in a justifiable way is no easy task (Jackson 2000). In sum, International Society is an approach which tells us something about a world of sovereign states where power and law are both present. The ethics of prudence and the national interest claim the responsibilities of statespeople alongside their duty to observe international rules and procedures. World politics is a world of states but it is also a world of human beings, and it will often be difficult to reconcile the demands and claims of both. The main elements of the International Society approach are summarized in Table 2.3.

The challenge posed by the International Society approach does not count as a new major debate. It should rather be seen as an extension of the first debate and a repudiation of the seeming behaviouralist triumph in the second debate. International Society builds on classical realist and liberal ideas, combining and expanding them in ways

**TABLE 2.3** International Society (the English School)

METHODOLOGICAL FOCUS	MAIN ELEMENTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM
Understanding	Power, national interest (realist element)
Judgement	Rules, procedures, international law (liberal element)
Values	Universal human rights, one world for all (cosmopolitan element)
Norms and historical knowledge	
Theorist inside subject	

that provide an alternative to both. International Society adds another perspective to the first great debate between realism and liberalism by rejecting the sharp divisions between them. Although International Society scholars did not enter that debate directly, their approach clearly suggests that the difference between realism and liberalism is drawn too sharply; the historical world does not choose between power and law in quite the categorical way that the debate implies.

As regards the second great debate between the traditionalists and the behaviouralists, International Society theorists did enter that debate by firmly rejecting the latter approach and upholding the former approach (Bull 1969). International Society scholars do not see any possibility of the construction of ‘laws’ of IR on the model of the natural sciences. For them, that project is flawed: it is based on an intellectual misreading of the character of international relations. For International Society scholars, IR is entirely a field of human relations: it is a normative subject and it cannot be fully understood in non-normative terms. IR is about understanding, not explaining; it involves the exercise of judgement: putting oneself in the place of statespeople to try better to understand the dilemmas they confront in their conduct of foreign policy. The notion of an international society also provides a perspective for studying the issues of human rights and humanitarian intervention that figured prominently on the IR agenda at that time. Finally, the International Society approach includes a historical dimension that is missing in much contemporary IR. Two key claims here are that many international systems have been characterized by hegemony rather than the balance of power and that the norms of international society are historical creations that have characterized some but not all international systems (Bull 1977; Watson 1992; Møller 2014).

To sum up: International Society scholars emphasize the simultaneous presence in international society of both realist and liberal elements. There is conflict and there is cooperation; there are states and there are individuals. These different elements cannot be simplified and abstracted into a single theory that emphasizes only one explanatory variable—i.e., power. That would be a much too simple view of world politics and would distort reality. International Society theorists argue for a humanist approach

that recognizes the simultaneous presence of all these elements, and the need for holistic and historical study of the problems and dilemmas that arise in that complex situation.

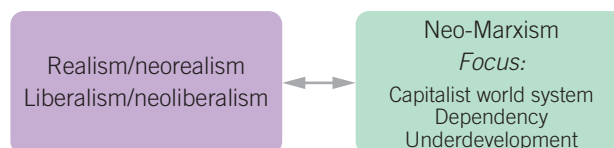
## 2.8 International Political Economy (IPE)

The academic IR debates presented so far are mainly concerned with international politics. Economic affairs play a secondary role. There is little concern with the weak states in the developing world. As we noted in Chapter 1, the decades after the Second World War were a period of decolonization. A large number of ‘new’ countries appeared on the map as the old colonial powers gave up their control and the former colonies were given political independence. Many of the ‘new’ states are weak in economic terms: they are at the bottom of the global economic hierarchy and constitute a world of developing states (formerly referred to as the Third World). In the 1970s, developing countries started to press for changes in the international system to improve their economic position in relation to developed countries. Around this time, neo-Marxism emerged as an attempt to theorize about economic underdevelopment in developing countries.

This became the basis for a third major debate in IR about international wealth and international poverty—i.e., about International Political Economy (IPE). IPE is basically about who gets what in the international economic and political system. The third debate takes the shape of a neo-Marxist critique of the capitalist world economy together with liberal IPE and realist IPE responses concerning the relationship between economics and politics in international relations (see Figure 2.5). We introduce these three perspectives in Chapter 6.

Neo-Marxism is an attempt to analyse the situation of developing countries by applying the tools of analysis first developed by Karl Marx. Marx, a famous nineteenth-political economist, focused on capitalism in Europe; he argued that the bourgeoisie or capitalist class used its economic power to exploit and oppress the proletariat, or working class. Neo-Marxists extend that analysis to developing countries by arguing that the global capitalist economy controlled by the wealthy capitalist states is used to impoverish the world’s poor countries. ‘Dependence’ is a core concept for neo-Marxists. They claim that countries in the developing world are not poor because they are inherently backward or undeveloped. Rather, it is because they have been actively underdeveloped by the rich countries of the developed world. Developing countries are subject to unequal exchange: in order to participate in the global capitalist economy they must sell their raw materials at cheap prices, and have to buy finished goods at high prices. In

**FIGURE 2.5** Third major debate in IR



marked contrast, rich countries can buy low and sell high. For neo-Marxists that situation is imposed upon poor countries by the wealthy capitalist states.

Andre Gunder Frank claims that unequal exchange and appropriation of economic surplus by the few at the expense of the many are inherent in capitalism (Frank 1967). As long as the capitalist system exists, there will be underdevelopment in the developing world. A similar view is taken by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1983), who has analysed the overall development of the capitalist world system since its beginning in the sixteenth century. Wallerstein allows for the possibility that some developing countries can 'move upwards' in the global capitalist hierarchy. But only a few can do that; there is no room at the top for everybody. Capitalism is a hierarchy based on the exploitation of the poor by the rich, and it will remain that way unless and until it is replaced.

The liberal view of IPE is almost exactly the opposite. Liberal IPE scholars argue that human prosperity can be achieved by the free global expansion of capitalism beyond the boundaries of the sovereign state, and by the decline of the significance of these boundaries. Liberals draw on the economic analysis of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and other classical liberal economists, who argue that free markets together with private property and individual freedom create the basis for self-sustaining economic progress for everybody involved (see also Friedman 1962: 13–14). Thus, whereas Marxist IPE views international capitalism as an instrument for exploitation of developing countries by developed countries, liberal IPE views it as an instrument of progressive change for all countries regardless of their level of development.

Realist IPE is different again. It can be traced back to the thoughts of Friedrich List, a nineteenth-century German economist. It is based on the idea that economic activity should be put into the service of building a strong state and supporting the national interest. Wealth should thus be controlled and managed by the state; that statist IPE doctrine is often referred to as 'mercantilism' or 'economic nationalism'. For mercantilists, the creation of wealth is the necessary basis for increased power of the state. Wealth is therefore an instrument in the creation of national security and national welfare. Moreover, the smooth functioning of a free market depends on political power. Without a dominant or hegemonic power, there can be no liberal world economy (Gilpin 1987: 72). The United States has had the role of hegemon since the end of the First World War. But beginning in the early 1970s, the US was increasingly challenged economically by Japan and by Western Europe. And according to realist IPE, that decline of US leadership has weakened the liberal world economy, because there is no other state that can perform the role of global hegemon.

These different views of IPE show up in analyses of three important and related issues of recent years. The first issue concerns economic **globalization**; that is, the spread and intensification of all kinds of economic relations between countries. Does economic globalization undermine 'national' economies by erasing national borders and by subjecting national economies to the exigencies of the global economy? The second issue is about who wins and who loses in the process of economic globalization. The third issue concerns how we should view the relative importance of economics and politics and how the rules of the game are formulated and maintained in international affairs. Are global economic relations ultimately controlled by states which set out the framework of rules

that economic actors have to observe? To what extent has system governance become more difficult since the post-war **Bretton Woods** era? Underlying many of these questions is the issue of state sovereignty: are the forces of global economics making the sovereign state obsolete? The three approaches to IPE come up with very different answers to these questions, as we shall see in Chapter 10. We will also identify key differences between the hard science American school of IPE and the more qualitative and normative tradition of IPE that dominates outside of America.

In short, the third major debate further complicates the discipline of IR because it shifts the subject away from political and military issues and towards economic and social issues, and because it introduces the distinct socioeconomic problems of developing countries. It expands the academic IR research agenda to include socioeconomic questions of welfare as well as political–military questions of security. Yet both realist and liberal traditions have specific views on IPE, and those views have been attacked by neo-Marxism. And all three perspectives are in rather sharp disagreement with each other: they take fundamentally different views of the international political economy in terms of both concepts and values. In that sense, we do indeed have a third debate. The debate was focused on North–South relations at first, but it has long since expanded to include IPE issues in all areas of international relations. There was no clear winner in the third debate, as we shall see in Chapter 6 and Chapter 10.

## 2.9 Dissident Voices: Alternative Approaches to IR

The debates introduced so far have concerned the established theoretical traditions in the discipline: realism, liberalism, International Society, and the theories of IPE. Currently a fourth debate on IR is well under way. It involves various critiques of the established traditions by alternative approaches, sometimes identified as post-positivism (Smith et al. 1996). There have always been ‘dissident voices’ in the discipline of IR: philosophers and scholars who have rejected established views and tried to replace them with alternatives. But in recent years these voices have grown stronger.

Two factors help explain that development. The end of the Cold War changed the international agenda in some fundamental ways. In place of a clear-cut East/West conflict dominated by two contending superpowers, a number of diverse issues emerged in world politics, including, for example, state partition and disintegration, civil war, terrorism, democratization, national minorities, humanitarian intervention, ethnic cleansing, mass migration and refugee problems, gender inequality, environmental security, climate change, and so forth. An increasing number of IR scholars expressed dissatisfaction with the dominant Cold War approach to IR: the neorealism of Kenneth Waltz. Many IR scholars now take issue with Waltz’s claim that the complex world of international relations can be squeezed into a few law-like statements about the structure of the international system and the balance of power. They also criticize Waltzian neorealism for its conservative political outlook; there is not much in neorealism that can point to change and the creation of a better world.

Post-Cold War developments do not fit well into a neorealist analysis. For example, the United States is today the preponderant power in the world, especially in terms

of military strength. Neorealist logic dictates that other states will balance the United States because offsetting US power is a means of guaranteeing one's own security (Waltz 2000: 56; Fettweiss 2004; Paul et al. 2004). But this has not happened; there has been no major balancing of US power since the end of the Cold War, though the rise of China might be changing this. In order to understand that situation, we are led towards different types of analysis of current international relations, including constructivism, some forms of liberalism, International Society theories, or even classical realism.

**Social constructivism** is an approach that has grown in importance since the 1980s. Constructivists emphasize the role of human agency and the importance of ideas in international relations. This stands in contrast to neorealist and neoliberal theory, which focus on material power, such as military force, economic capabilities, and interdependencies. The thinking of central actors such as Donald Trump or of international organizations such as the IMF, and the ideas and norms of behaviour that such actors promote are as important for international relations as is the distribution of military and other capabilities. Chapter 7 introduces social constructivism. Constructivists argue that the international system is constituted by ideas, not material power.

In recent years, the 'dissident voices' in IR have increased in number; there is now a diverse group of approaches that question the established traditions in more fundamental ways. Uneven globalization has helped create rising inequality in the world and has also led to mass migration. This has sharpened the focus on identity: who are 'we' and what are our relations to other groups at home and abroad? One aspect concerns the different ways in which IR is practised and developed in various parts of the Global South. We have mentioned the dominance of the United States in the development of the discipline of IR. The new focus on international relations from the Global South is an attempt to focus on the different ways IR scholarship has developed in other parts of the world, in particular outside the Global North (Acharya and Buzan 2010; Hobson 2012; Deciancio 2016; Smith and Tickner 2020). There are always several stories to tell in IR, and there should be an 'aspiration for greater inclusiveness and diversity in our discipline' (Acharya 2014: 649). A recent collection of scholarship discusses how this might affect the discipline of IR, our view of global issues, the selection of key concepts and categories, and the future of IR (Smith and Tickner 2020).

Another alternative approach focuses on the environment. Most observers agree that the globe is facing a severe environmental crisis due to climate change (global warming) and a host of other challenges. Thinking about international relations is typically based on human-centred thought (**anthropocentrism**), whereas the emerging '**green theory**' has ecology-centred thought (ecocentrism) as its foundation. It promotes a 'green theory of value' where the preservation of nature is put before the promotion of human development (Dyer 2017). Some believe that a 'green dimension' would not be too difficult to add onto our current theoretical debates about international security and economics. Others claim that existing IR thinking is simply 'ecologically blind' (Eckersley 2016). Such a stance involves dramatic changes in our view of what is important in international relations. We return to this debate in Chapter 11.

Feminism, which we introduce in Chapter 8, entered the discipline of IR in the 1980s. It focused on the subordination of women in international politics and economics.

A great deal of feminist IR scholarship is concerned with documenting and analysing different aspects of a gendered world with women in less privileged and less visible positions. Emphasis is also on the identification and critique of socially constructed gender norms that assign higher values to characteristics of masculinity than to attributes connected to femininity. In several ways, established IR theory is charged with promoting gendered ideas about hierarchy that confirm the subordination of women (Smith 2018; Zalewski 2019).

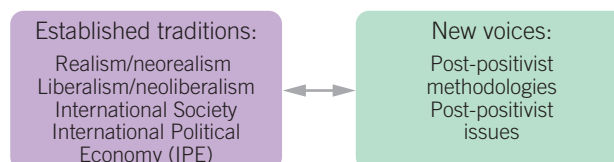
Finally, we should note that there is a vibrant debate today about world order. The central issue is whether things are generally getting better in the world so that the people and the planet are moving forward in most respects, or whether things are getting worse so that we are moving backwards or downwards. This debate is not centred on one theory or set of approaches. It involves contributions from most of the theoretical positions discussed in this book, and we return to it in Chapter 12.

In sum, developments since the end of the Cold War have pointed away from the theoretical convictions of neorealism and have also challenged the great optimism of many liberal views. New perspectives have emerged, both as regards theory; that is, *how* to best approach the study of IR, and as regards substantial issues; that is, *which* issues should be considered the most important ones for IR to study (see Figure 2.6). We have chosen to present these developments in four chapters later in this volume.

Chapter 7 presents constructivist theories of IR. Chapter 8 considers post-positivist approaches, including post-structuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism. These approaches criticize established theories on both methodological and substantial grounds, but they are not in agreement about what is the best replacement for the methods and theories that are now being rejected. Chapter 11 addresses key issues in contemporary IR: climate change; international terrorism; religion in IR; and balance and hegemony in world history. They are rival answers to the question: what is the most important issue or concern in world politics now that the Cold War has come to an end? Finally, Chapter 12 takes on the big question of ‘world order or world chaos?’, presenting the key arguments from the major contenders in the discussion.

Social constructivism and the non-traditional issues and methodologies mentioned here have something in common: they claim that established traditions in IR fail to come to grips with the post-Cold War changes of world politics. These recent approaches should thus be seen as ‘new voices’ that are trying to point the way to an academic IR discipline that is more in tune with international relations in the new millennium. In short, many scholars argue that a fourth IR debate has been thrown open in the 1990s between the established traditions on the one hand and these new voices on the other.

**FIGURE 2.6** Fourth major debate in IR





## 2.10 Criteria for Good Theory

This chapter has introduced the main theoretical traditions in IR. It is necessary to be familiar with theory, because facts do not speak for themselves. We always look at the world, consciously or not, through a specific set of lenses; we may think of those lenses as theory. Is development taking place in the developing world or is it underdevelopment? Is the world a more secure or a more dangerous place since the end of the Cold War? Are contemporary states more prone to cooperate or to compete with each other? Facts alone cannot answer these questions; we need help from theories. Theories tell us which facts are important and which are unimportant; that is, they structure our view of the world. They are based on certain values, and often they also contain visions of how we want the world to be. Early liberal thinking about IR, for example, was driven by the determination never to repeat the disaster of the First World War. Liberals hoped the creation of new international organizations would foster a more peaceful and cooperative world. People's values and political priorities thus often play a role in choosing one theory ahead of another.

Because theory is necessary in thinking systematically about the world, it is better to get the most important theories out in the open and subject them to scrutiny. We should examine their concepts, their claims about how the world hangs together, and what the important facts are; we should probe their values and visions. We should also spend time on the relationships between theories on the one hand and the real world on the other hand; we have devoted the entire Part 3 of the book to that subject (Chapters 9 through 12).

These considerations always beg a big question: which theory is best? It may seem an innocent question, but it raises a number of difficult and complex issues. One answer is that the question about the best theory is not really meaningful, because different theories, such as realism and liberalism, are like different games, played by different people (Rosenau 1967; see also Smith 1997). This metaphor fits even better if we look at the more abstract philosophical wagers different theories make. Different theories are based on different views of whether or not reality is independent of the human mind that perceives it and about whether or not the most important things that our theories deal with are phenomena that can be observed empirically. At this very abstract level, there are definitely different games being played, with different sets of rules. There has recently been a strong call for recognizing this diversity and hence for accepting pluralism in IR (Jackson 2016). The most important aspect of this pluralism is that we cannot use one single methodology to assess theories that make starkly different assumptions about the world and the relation of the researcher to that world. This is a point we need to bear in mind when discussing theories such as social constructivism and post-positivism in the chapters that follow.

However, even if theories are in many ways different, it does make sense to rank them on some general criteria, just as it makes sense to select the athlete of the year even if the candidates for that honour compete in very different athletic disciplines. What would be the criteria for identifying the best theory? We may think of several relevant criteria, among them:

- Coherence: the theory should be consistent, i.e., free of internal contradictions.
- Clarity of exposition: the theory should be formulated in a clear and lucid manner.



- **Unbiased:** the theory should not be based on purely subjective valuations. No theory is value-free, but the theory should strive to be candid about its normative premises and values.
- **Scope:** the theory should be relevant for a large number of important issues. A theory with limited scope, for example, is a theory about US decision-making in the Gulf War. A theory with wide scope is a theory about foreign policy decision-making in general. Moreover, the theory is better if the issues it explains have hitherto been puzzling and if it offers policy advice for decision makers and practitioners.
- **Depth:** the theory should be able to explain and understand as much as possible of the phenomenon that it purports to tackle. It should be as complete as possible. For example, a theory of European integration has limited depth if it explains only some part of that process and much more depth if it explains most of it.

Other possible criteria could be set forth (see e.g., Walt 2005: 26–8); but it must be emphasized that there is no objective way of choosing between the evaluative criteria. It is clear that there are often trade-offs between the criteria and that some criteria can load the dice in favour of some types of theory and against others. There is no simple way around the problem.

As textbook writers, we see it as our duty to present what we consider the most important theories and their relationships to the real world in a way that draws out the strength of each theory but is critical of its weaknesses and limitations. This book is not aimed at guiding you towards one single theory which we see as the best; it is aimed at identifying the pros and cons of several important theories in order to enable you to make your own well-considered choices from the available possibilities.

In this connection, a final issue is important. As has often been pointed out, cooperation between theories is possible; they can be combined in various ways (but not in every way!) in order to create stronger analytical frameworks (Howard 2010; Sil and Katzenstein 2010). Theories in IR have traditionally operated at different levels of analysis. Kenneth Waltz (1959) famously distinguished whether scholars take the level of the individual, the national level, or the state system as the starting point in explaining international politics. Waltz refers to this as three different images, or what J. David Singer (1961) in his review of Waltz's book termed different 'levels of analysis'. Classical realism is very much based on individuals, or what Waltz termed the 'first image', whereas neorealism is based on the state system, or the 'third image'. The liberal theory of the democratic peace, meanwhile, is a good example of the 'second image', which is based on the national level.

In recent decades, strong voices within IR have called for explanations that combine levels, or cut across images. More particularly, there seems to be an emerging consensus that many outcomes of interest to IR scholars can only be made sense of by integrating system-level pressures and domestic-level factors (Sørensen 2001; Hui 2005; Schweller 2006; Deudney 2007; Nexon 2009: 353–4; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2012). For example, states react to changes at the systemic level (e.g., the US turns its attention towards Asia due to the growth of Chinese power). But they do so differently because of domestic factors (e.g., Joe Biden's policy is different from Donald Trump's policy). A good

example of such an integrated approach is found in neoclassical realism, which takes international anarchy and power competition as a starting point but argues that state behaviour is also determined by domestic conditions (Schweller 2006). Another example is recent research into the different political constraints on foreign policy faced in democracies and autocracies (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2012). This research builds on Robert Putnam's (1988: 427) seminal work on 'two-level games', which he framed as an attempt to address the following problem: 'Domestic politics and international relations are often somewhat entangled, but our theories have not yet sorted out the puzzling tangle.'

Attempts to combine the two levels have brought IR and Comparative Politics into a close dialogue in recent decades. Not long ago, these two disciplines followed what Rustow (1970: 348) once termed a 'conventional division of labor' with IR focusing on international factors and Comparative Politics focusing on domestic factors. Today, they have become so enmeshed with each other that some scholars openly discuss whether we should abandon them as subdisciplines and move on by creating one big subject (Reiter 2015). Our position is that doing so would be throwing out the baby with the bath water. There remains a substantial difference in focus: whereas IR scholars are mainly interested in domestic factors when they contribute to our understanding of international relations, comparativists mainly emphasize international factors when they affect domestic political processes. Hence, '[e]ach may look at the same subject matter without asking the same questions' (Gourevitch 1978: 881). These differences should be evident to anyone who reads an introduction to IR and compares it with an introduction to Comparative Politics.

But whatever the vantage point, our theories certainly need to bridge the divide between international and domestic factors. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. One of the key reasons for the dominance of neorealism since the publication of Kenneth Waltz's (1979) *Theory of International Politics* is how forceful his purely systemic or third image theory is. As with any good theory, it explains a lot with a little. It does so by abstracting from reality, leaving behind the messy details that we would need to factor in to understand particular empirical developments (Jackson 2016: 123–5). As Wæver (2009: 204–5) puts it, the book's 'grand success owed much to being widely accepted as setting a new standard for "theory" in the discipline'.

It is difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to reach this standard when we try to combine levels. The analytical purchase of Waltz's theory owes exactly to his argument that we can ignore the first and second image—what he terms 'reductionist' theories (1979: Ch. 4)—in favour of a pure third image or systemic theory. It is not that Waltz does not recognize that domestic factors are often important and that they sometimes mean that states will act in a way that contradicts the predictions based on the structure of international politics. But he abstracts from this in order to focus on how the system level shapes and shoves the units and domestic actors in general terms.

By integrating levels, we risk weakening our theories and we face the problem that we might be trying to combine theories that cannot easily be synthesized (Wæver 2009: 213–14). We here face a trade-off that can be stated as follows: by combining levels we gain a more comprehensive understanding of empirical developments but we risk losing

theoretical clarity. The simple and elegant theory explains some important things but leaves much in the dark. A complex and nuanced theory may explain more but also draws so much in that we may be left in doubt about what is really important and what is less important. At the same time, we face an increasing need to combine the analysis of domestic and international forces in an intensely globalized world. We will end each chapter with a discussion about how well theories fare when confronted with this trade-off.

## 2.11 Conclusion

The above-mentioned theories constitute the main analytical tools and concerns of contemporary IR. We have seen how the subject developed through a series of debates between different theoretical approaches. These debates were not conducted in splendid isolation from everything else; they were shaped and influenced by historical events, by the major political and economic problems of the day. They were also influenced by methodological developments in other areas of scholarship. These elements are summarized in Figure 2.1.

No single theoretical approach has clearly won the day in IR. The main theoretical traditions and alternative approaches that we have outlined are all actively employed in the discipline today. That situation reflects the necessity of different approaches to capture different aspects of a very complicated historical and contemporary reality. World politics is not dominated by one single issue or conflict; on the contrary, it is shaped and influenced by many different issues and conflicts. The pluralist situation of IR scholarship also reflects the personal preferences of different scholars: they often prefer particular theories for reasons that may have as much to do with their personal values and world views as with what takes place in international relations and what is required to understand those events and episodes.

### \* Key points

- IR thinking has evolved in stages that are marked by specific debates between groups of scholars. The first major debate is between *utopian liberalism* and *realism*; the second debate is on method, between *traditional approaches* and *behaviouralism*. The third debate is between *neorealism/neoliberalism* and *neo-Marxism*; and an ongoing fourth debate is between *established traditions* and *post-positivist alternatives*.
- The first major debate was won by the realists. During the Cold War, realism became the dominant way of thinking about international relations not only among scholars but also among politicians, diplomats, and so-called 'ordinary people'. Morgenthau's (1960) summary of realism became the standard introduction to IR in the 1950s and 1960s.
- The second major debate is about method. The contenders are traditionalists and behaviourists. The former try to understand a complicated social world of human affairs and the

values fundamental to it, such as order, freedom, and justice. The latter approach, behaviouralism, finds no place for morality or ethics in international theory. Behaviouralism wants to classify, measure, and explain through the formulation of general laws like those formulated in the 'hard' sciences of chemistry, physics, etc. The behaviouralists seemed to triumph for a time but in the end neither side won the debate. Today both types of method are used in the discipline. There was a revival of traditional normative approaches to IR after the end of the Cold War.

- In the 1960s and 1970s, neoliberalism challenged realism by arguing that interdependence, integration, and democracy are changing IR. Neorealism responded that anarchy and the balance of power are still at the heart of IR.
- International Society theorists maintain that IR contains both 'realist' elements of conflict and 'liberal' elements of cooperation, and that these elements cannot be collapsed into a single theoretical synthesis. They also emphasize human rights and other cosmopolitan features of world politics, and they defend the traditional approach to IR.
- The third debate is characterized by a neo-Marxist attack on the established positions of realism/neorealism and liberalism/neoliberalism. This debate concerns IPE. It creates a more complex situation in the discipline because it expands the terrain towards economic issues and because it introduces the distinct problems of developing countries and of the politics of international economic cooperation. There is no clear winner of the third debate. Within IPE, the discussion between the main contenders continues.
- Currently a fourth debate is under way in IR; it involves an attack on the established traditions by alternative approaches, sometimes identified as 'post-positivist alternatives'. The debate raises both methodological issues (i.e., *how* to approach the study of an issue) and substantial issues (i.e., *which* issues should be considered the most important ones). Some of these approaches also reject the scientific claims of neorealism and neoliberalism. These dissident voices have increased in number and influence in recent years.

## ? Questions

- Identify the major debates within IR. Why do the debates often linger on without any clear winner emerging?
- Which are the established theoretical traditions in IR? How can they be seen as 'established'?
- Why was early IR strongly influenced by liberalism?
- Seen over the long term, realism is the dominant theoretical tradition in IR. Why?
- Why do scholars have pet theories? What are your own theoretical preferences?
- Is it fair to put the label 'utopian liberalism' on the liberal politics of the 1920s? Why or why not?
- How much of a challenge do the alternative approaches present to the established theories in IR?
- What are the pros and cons of combining system-level pressures and domestic factors in IR theories?

## ■ Guide to further reading

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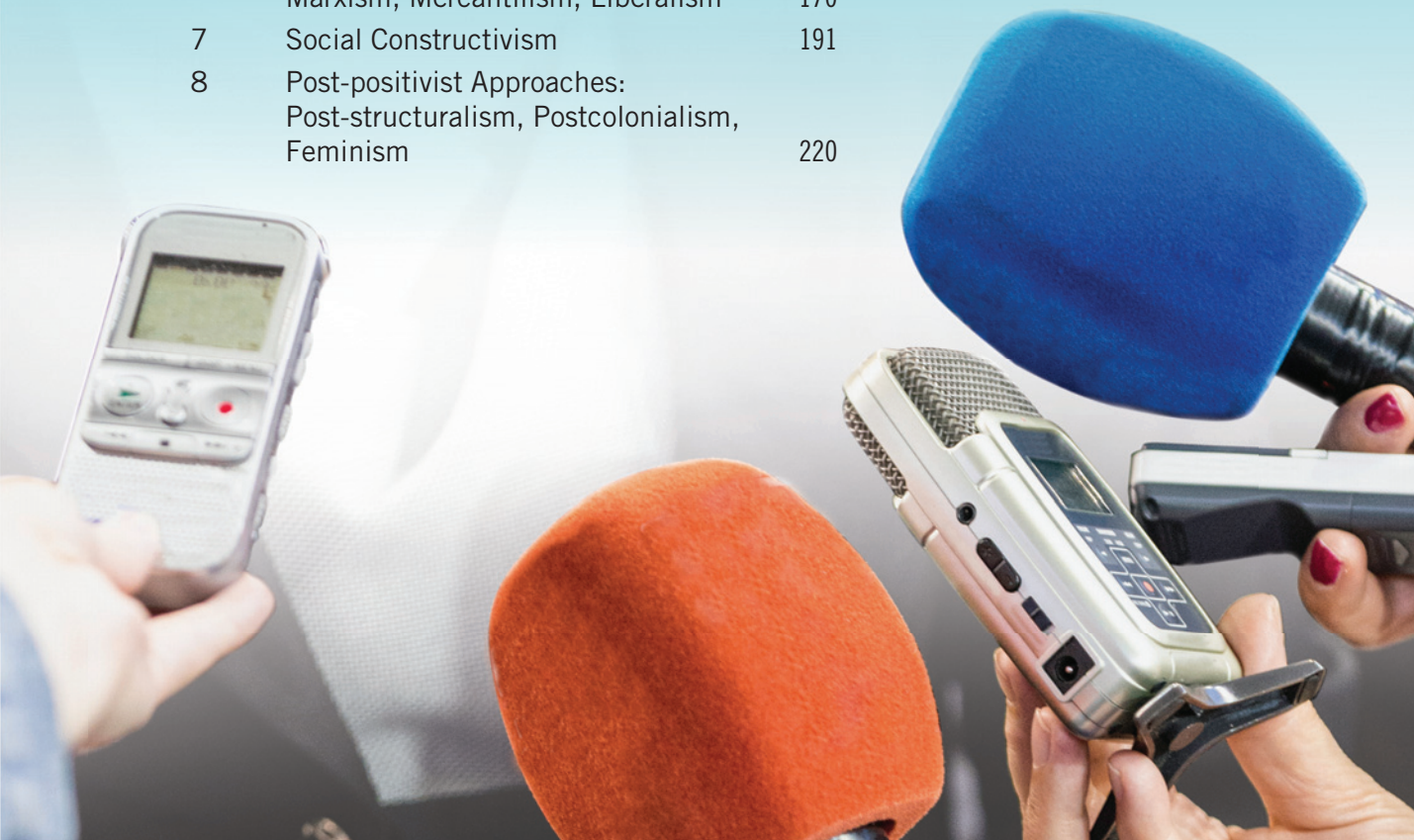


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## PART 2

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# CHAPTER 3

## Realism

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### Summary

This chapter sketches the realist tradition in IR. The point of departure for the chapter is that realism is more accurately described as a research programme or as a theoretical tradition than as a coherent theory. The chapter takes note of an important dichotomy in realist thought between classical realism and contemporary realism, including strategic as well as structural approaches. Classical realists emphasize the normative aspects of realism as well as the empirical aspects. Most contemporary realists pursue a social scientific analysis of the structures and processes of world politics, but they are inclined to ignore norms and values. The chapter discusses and critiques both classical and social scientific strands of realist thought and it shows that realists often disagree among themselves. It examines a recent theoretical debate among realist IR scholars concerning the relevance of the balance of power concept. The concluding section assesses the way different realist theories treat international and domestic factors.



### 3.1 Introduction: Elements of Realism

Basic realist ideas and assumptions are: (1) a pessimistic view of human nature; (2) a conviction that international relations are necessarily conflictual and that international conflicts are ultimately resolved by force; (3) a high regard for the values of national security and state survival; and (4) a basic scepticism that there can be progress in international politics which is comparable to that in domestic political life. These pervasive ideas and assumptions steer the thought of most leading realist IR theorists, past and present.

In realist thought, humans are characterized as being preoccupied with their own well-being in their competitive relations with each other. They desire to be in the driver's seat. They do not wish to be taken advantage of. This pessimistic view of human nature is strongly evident in the IR theory of Hans Morgenthau (1965, 1985), who was the leading classical realist thinker of the twentieth century. He sees men and women as having a 'will to power'. That is particularly evident in politics and especially international politics: 'Politics is a struggle for power over men, and whatever its ultimate aim may be, power is its immediate goal and the modes of acquiring, maintaining, and demonstrating it determine the technique of political action' (Morgenthau 1965: 195).

Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and indeed all classical realists share that view to a greater or lesser extent. They believe that the acquisition and possession of power, and the deployment and uses of power, are central preoccupations of political activity. International politics is thus portrayed as—above all else—'power politics': an arena of rivalry, conflict, and war between states in which the same basic problems of defending the national interest and ensuring the survival of the state, and the security of its people, repeat themselves over and over again.

Realists thus share a core assumption that the international state system is anarchical—i.e., a system with no higher, overarching authority; there is no world government. The state is the pre-eminent actor in world politics. International relations are primarily relations of states. All other actors in world politics—individuals, international organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc.—are either far less important or unimportant. The main point of foreign policy is to advance and defend the interests of the state. But states are not equal. On the contrary, there is an international hierarchy of power among states. The most important states in world politics are the great powers. International relations are understood by realists as primarily a struggle between the great powers for domination and security. Lesser and weaker powers are of secondary importance. They can only realistically adjust their policies and adapt their relations in response to the demands and expectations of the great powers.

The normative core of realism is national security and state survival: these are the values that drive realist doctrine and realist foreign policy. The state is considered to be essential for the good life of its citizens: without a state to guarantee the means and conditions of security, human life is bound to be, in the famous phrase of Thomas Hobbes

(1946: 82), ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’. The state is thus seen as a protector of its territory, of the population, and of their distinctive and valued way of life. The national interest is the final arbiter in judging foreign policy.

The fact that all states must pursue their own national interest means that other countries and governments can never be relied upon or completely trusted. All international agreements are provisional and conditional on the willingness of states to observe them. That makes treaties and all other conventions, customs, rules, laws, and so on between states merely expedient arrangements which can and will be set aside if they conflict with the vital interests of states. There are no international obligations in the legal or ethical sense of the word—i.e., bonds of mutual duty—between independent states. The only fundamental responsibility of statespeople is to advance and to defend the national interest by whatever means. That is nowhere stated more brutally than by Machiavelli in his famous book, *The Prince* (see Box 3.3).

However, most realists also argue that a balance of power between great powers presents a way of limiting war. Only when power faces power is it possible to secure some order in the international sphere. Realists here echo the ancient Latin dictum *Si vis pacem, para bellum*, ‘If you want peace, prepare for war’. They also echo the Old Testament saying that there is nothing new under the sun. According to realist theory, the fundamental characteristics of international relations remain the same: groups (primarily states) struggle for security and domination in an anarchic international system. That means that there can be no progressive change in world politics comparable to the developments that characterize domestic political life (Wight 1966a). That also means that realist IR theory is considered to be valid not only at particular times and places but at all times, everywhere, because the foregoing basic facts of world politics never change.

There are also many issues that divide realists. Realism is best seen as a general research programme, the core of which is the shared emphasis on state survival, international anarchy, and the pessimistic view of human nature described above; but which differs in many other respects. Realism has been referred to as a ‘general orientation’ or even a ‘paradigm’ rather than a theory (Donnelly 2000: 6, 75), and scholars distinguish between different kinds of realism (e.g., Donnelly 2000; Elman 2007). The most general distinction is between **classical realism** and **social science realism**. Classical realism is one of the ‘traditional’ approaches to IR. At heart, it is a normative approach that focuses on the core political values of national security and state survival. But some classical realists also attempt to identify laws of international politics. These scientific ambitions sometimes clash with the normative element. For instance, as we detail below, this is the case in the influential writings of the American realist Hans Morgenthau. Classical realist thought has been evident in many different historical periods, from ancient Greece right down to the present time. Social science realism, which includes **strategic** and **structural realism** as well as **neoclassical realism**, is basically a scientific approach. It is largely (although not exclusively) American in origin. Indeed, it has been and perhaps still is the most prominent IR theory in the United States, which by far is home to the largest number of IR scholars in the world.

## 3.2 Classical Realism

What is classical realism? Who are the leading classical realists? What are their key ideas and arguments? No other tradition in international relations can claim as impressive a lineage as realism, including both ancient authors such as Thucydides and Augustine, early modern political theorists such as Machiavelli, Spinoza, and Hobbes, and modern social scientists such as Max Weber (Smith 1986). In this section we examine the international thought of three outstanding classical realists of the past: (1) the ancient Greek historian Thucydides; (2) the Renaissance Italian political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli; and (3) the seventeenth-century English political and legal philosopher Thomas Hobbes. In the next subsection, we shall single out for special treatment the classical realist thought of the twentieth-century German–American IR theorist Hans J. Morgenthau.

### 3.2.1 Thucydides

Thucydides formulated two important realist claims: First, that the structure of the international system affects relations between states, including ultimately war; second, that moral reasoning has little bearing on relations between states (Smith 1986: 9–10). What we call international relations Thucydides saw as the inevitable competition and conflict between ancient Greek city-states (which together composed the cultural-linguistic civilization known as Hellas) and between Hellas and neighbouring non-Greek monarchies and empires, such as Macedonia and Persia. Neither the states of Hellas nor their non-Greek neighbours were in any sense equal (see Box 3.1). On the contrary, they were substantially unequal: there were a few ‘great powers’—such as Athens, Sparta, and the Persian Empire—and many smaller and lesser powers such as the tiny island statelets of the Aegean Sea. That inequality was considered to be inevitable and natural. All states, large and small, must adapt to that given reality of unequal power and

#### BOX 3.1 Key Developments: International relations in ancient Greece

The Greeks established the Hellenic League . . . and placed it under the leadership of Sparta and Athens. Despite the semblance of Greek unity during the Persian Wars (492–77 BCE) there were serious conflicts between members of the League, mostly occasioned by the smaller city-states’ fear of Athenian imperialism and expansion. Thus, after the Greek victories over the Persians, Athens’ competitors, led by Sparta, formed a rival organization, the Peloponnesian League, an intricate alliance and collective security system designed to deter further Athenian expansion . . . A bitter competition over trade and naval supremacy between Corinth and Athens led ultimately to the Peloponnesian Wars involving the two military alliances.

**Holsti (1988: 38–9)**

conduct themselves accordingly, or risk destruction. Ancient history is full of examples of states and empires, small and large, which were destroyed.

So Thucydides emphasizes the limited choices and the restricted sphere of manoeuvre available to rulers in the conduct of foreign policy. He also emphasizes that decisions have consequences; before any final decision is made, a decision maker should have carefully thought through the likely consequences, bad as well as good. Thucydides thus emphasizes the ethics of caution and prudence in the conduct of foreign policy in an international world of great inequality, of restricted foreign-policy choices, and of ever-present danger as well as opportunity. Foresight, prudence, caution, and judgement are the characteristic political ethics of classical realism that Thucydides and most other classical realists are at pains to distinguish from private morality and the principle of justice. If a country and its government wish to survive and prosper, they had better pay attention to these fundamental political maxims of international relations.

In his famous study of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE), Thucydides (1972: 407) put his realist philosophy into the mouths of the leaders of Athens—a great power—in their dialogue with the leaders of Melos—a minor power—during a moment of conflict between the two city-states in 416 BCE. The Melians made an appeal to the principle of justice, which to them meant that their honour and dignity as an independent city-state should be respected by the powerful Athenians. But, according to Thucydides, justice is of a special kind in international relations. It is not about equal treatment for all, because states are in fact unequal. Rather, it is about recognizing your relative strength or weakness, about knowing your proper place, and about adapting to the natural reality of unequal power. Thucydides, therefore, let the Athenians reply to the Melian appeal as set out in Box 3.2.

That is probably the most famous example of the classical realist understanding of international relations as basically an anarchy of separate states that have no real choice except to operate according to the dictates of power politics in which security and survival are the primary values and war is the final arbiter. Thucydides seems to have been the first to perceive classical Hellas as an international system dominated by its great powers. This was the foundation for his justly famous explanation of the

### BOX 3.2 Key Quotes: Thucydides on the strong and the weak

The standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept . . . this is the safe rule—to stand up to one's equals, to behave with deference to one's superiors, and to treat one's inferiors with moderation. Think it over again, then, when we have withdrawn from the meeting, and let this be a point that constantly recurs to your minds—that you are discussing the fate of your country, that you have only one country, and that its future for good or ill depends on this one single decision which you are going to make.

**Thucydides (1972: 406)**

Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens. According to Thucydides, ‘What made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta.’ Gilpin (1981; 1988) has termed this the theory of hegemonic war, that is, ‘the idea that the dynamic of international relations is provided by the differential growth of power among states’ (Gilpin 1988: 591). A number of later wars, including the Thirty Years War (1618–48), the Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815), and the First World War (1914–18) have been adduced as examples of this. In the Thirty Years War, the incumbent great power was the Habsburg Empire, which was threatened by the growing might of France and by upstarts such as Sweden. The conflict between France and Great Britain led to the Napoleonic Wars, and in the case of the First World War, it was Germany’s rise as a new superpower that made war inevitable, according to the theory of hegemonic war (Gilpin 1988). Elman (2007) terms this body of theory ‘Rise and fall’ realism and Gilpin (1988: 606) goes so far as to claim that Thucydides’s theory has ‘withstood the test of time better than any other generalization in the field of international relations’. Recently scholars have begun to discuss whether the rise of China—and the challenge it poses to the established superpower, the USA—might trigger yet another hegemonic war (Allison 2017).

### 3.2.2 Machiavelli

Power (the Lion) and deception (the Fox) are the two essential means for the conduct of foreign policy, according to the political teachings of Machiavelli (1984: 66). The supreme political value is national liberty (*libertas*), i.e., political independence. The main responsibility of rulers is always to seek the advantages and to defend the interests of their state and thus ensure its survival. That requires strength; if a state is not strong, it will be a standing invitation for others to prey upon it; the ruler must therefore be a lion. That also requires cunning and—if necessary—ruthlessness in the pursuit of self-interest: the ruler must also be a fox. If rulers are not astute, crafty, and adroit they might fail to notice a menace or threat which, if not guarded against, will harm or destroy them, their regime, and possibly even the state as well. That rulers must be both lions and foxes is at the heart of Machiavelli’s (1984: 66) realist theory. Classical realist IR theory, therefore, is primarily a theory of survival (Wight 1966a).

The overriding Machiavellian assumption is that the world is a dangerous place. But it is also an opportune place. If any political leader hopes to survive in such a world, they must always be aware of dangers, anticipate them, and take the necessary precautions against them. And if they hope to prosper, to enrich themselves, and to bask in the glory of their accumulated power and wealth, it is necessary for them to recognize and to exploit the opportunities that present themselves and to do that more quickly, more skilfully, and—if necessary—more ruthlessly than any of their rivals or enemies (see Box 3.3). The conduct of foreign policy is thus an instrumental or ‘Machiavellian’ activity based on the intelligent calculation of one’s power and interests as against the power and interests of rivals and competitors.

That shrewd and sober outlook is reflected in some typical Machiavellian maxims of realist statecraft, including the following: be aware of what is happening; do not wait

### BOX 3.3 Key Quotes: Machiavelli on the Prince's obligations

A prince . . . cannot observe all those things for which men are considered good, for in order to maintain the state he is often obliged to act against his promise, against charity, against humanity, and against religion. And therefore, it is necessary that he have a mind ready to turn itself according to the way the winds of fortune and the changeability of [political] affairs require . . . as long as it is possible, he should not stray from the good, but he should know how to enter into evil when necessity commands.

**Machiavelli (1984: 59–60)**

for things to happen; anticipate the motives and actions of others; do not wait for others to act; act before they do. The prudent state leader acts to ward off any threat posed by their neighbours. He or she should be prepared to engage in pre-emptive war and similar initiatives. The realist state leader is alert to opportunities in any political situation, and is prepared and equipped to exploit them. This is the manly *virtù* of statecraft that is likely to seduce *Fortuna*—the goddess of fortune—and ensure political success (Skinner 1981: 32–3).

Above all, according to Machiavelli, the responsible state leader must not operate in accordance with the principles of Christian ethics: love thy neighbour, be peaceful, and avoid war except in self-defence or in pursuit of a just cause; be charitable, share your wealth with others, always act in good faith, etc. Machiavelli sees these moral maxims as the height of political foolishness and irresponsibility; if political leaders act in accordance with Christian virtues, they are bound to come to grief and they will lose everything. Not only that, they will sacrifice the property and perhaps the freedom or even the lives of their citizens, who depend upon their statecraft. The implication is clear: if a ruler does not know or respect the maxims of power politics, their statecraft will fail and with it the security and welfare of the citizens who depend absolutely upon it. In other words, political responsibility is different from ordinary, private morality. The fundamental, overriding values are the security and the survival of the state; that is what must guide foreign policy. Machiavelli has been identified as being among the first to put forward and defend the 'autonomy of politics' from e.g. ethics and religion, i.e., the notion that political necessity may override any traditional norms of Christian or merely good behaviour. As the English historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin has argued, Machiavelli rejected an overarching system of morality: the values of political life differ fundamentally from the Christian values of charity, mercy, and forgiveness (Oakley 2015: 78–9).

Machiavelli's realist writings are sometimes portrayed (Forde 1992: 64) as 'manuals on how to thrive in a completely chaotic and immoral world'. But that view is somewhat misleading. The international world has its own morality of power. Rulers have responsibilities not merely to themselves or to their personal regimes but also to their country and its citizens: what Machiavelli, thinking of Florence, refers to as 'the republic'. This is the civic virtue aspect of Machiavellian realism: rulers have to be both lions and foxes because their people depend upon them for their survival and prosperity. That

dependence of the people upon their ruler, and specifically upon the wisdom of their foreign policy, is owing to the fact that the people's fate is entangled with the ruler's fate. That is the normative heart not only of Machiavellian realism but also of classical realism generally.

### 3.2.3 Hobbes and the Security Dilemma

Thomas Hobbes believed we can gain a fundamental insight into political life if we imagine men and women living in a 'natural' condition prior to the invention and institution of the sovereign state. He refers to that pre-civil condition as the '**state of nature**'. For Hobbes (1946: 82), the state of nature is an extremely adverse human circumstance in which there is a permanent 'state of war' 'of every man against every man'; in their natural condition every man, woman, and child is endangered by everybody else, life is constantly at risk, and nobody can be confident about their security and survival for any reasonable length of time. People are living in constant fear of each other (see Box 3.4).

Hobbes believes there is an escape route from the state of nature into a civilized human condition, and that is via the creation and maintenance of a sovereign state. The means of escape is by men and women turning their fear of each other into rational joint collaboration with each other to form a security pact that can guarantee each other's safety. Men and women paradoxically cooperate politically because of their fear of being hurt or killed by their neighbours: they are 'civilized by fear of death' (Oakeshott 1975: 36). Their mutual fear and insecurity drive them away from their natural condition: the war of all against all. In other words, they are basically driven to institute a sovereign state not by their reason (intelligence) but, rather, by their passion (emotion). Their intelligence alone is insufficient to propel such action. With the value of peace and order firmly in mind, they willingly and jointly collaborate to create a state with a sovereign government that possesses absolute authority and credible power to protect them from both internal disorders and foreign enemies and threats. In the civil condition—i.e., of peace and order—under the protection of the state, men and women have an opportunity to flourish in relative safety; they no longer live under the constant threat of injury and fear of death. Being secure and at peace, they are now free to prosper. As Hobbes puts it, they can pursue and enjoy 'felicity'; i.e., happiness, well-being, etc. (see Table 3.1).

#### BOX 3.4 Key Quotes: Hobbes on the state of nature

In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building . . . no arts; no letters; no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

**Hobbes (1946: 82)**

**TABLE 3.1** Key focus of three classical realists

THUCYDIDES	MACHIAVELLI	HOBBS
Political fate	Political agility	Political will
Necessity and security	Opportunity and security	Security dilemma
Political survival	Political survival	Political survival
Safety	Civic virtue	Peace and felicity

However, that statist solution to the problem of the natural condition of humankind automatically poses a serious political problem. A peaceful and civilized life can only be enjoyed within a state and it cannot extend beyond the state or exist between states. The very act of instituting a sovereign state to escape from the fearful state of nature among individuals simultaneously creates another state of nature between states.

That poses what is usually referred to as ‘the security dilemma’ in world politics: the achievement of personal security and domestic security through the creation of a state is necessarily accompanied by the condition of national and international insecurity that is rooted in the anarchy of the state system. The term ‘security dilemma’ was first coined by the German–American realist John Herz in his 1951 book *Political Realism and Political Idealism* but Hobbes had long ago anticipated the idea.

There is no escape from the international security dilemma in the way that there is an escape from the personal security dilemma, because there is no possibility of forming a global state or world government. The main point about the **international state of nature** is that it is a condition of actual or potential war; there can be no permanent or guaranteed peace between sovereign states—no international peace. But there can be domestic peace—peace within the framework of the sovereign state—and the opportunities that only civil peace can provide for men and women to enjoy felicity. The state is organized and equipped for war in order to provide domestic peace for its subjects or citizens. Domestic peace can be realized in this way. International peace is an unrealizable dream and a dangerous illusion.

We can summarize the discussion thus far by briefly stating what these three classical realists have in common. First, they agree that the human condition is one of insecurity and conflict that must be addressed and dealt with. Second, they agree that there is a body of political knowledge, or wisdom, to deal with the problem of security, and each of them tries to find the keys to unlock it. Finally, they agree that there is no final escape from this human condition, which is a permanent feature of human life. In other words, although there is a body of political wisdom—which can be identified and stated in the form of political maxims—there are no permanent or final solutions to the problems of politics—including international politics. There can be no enduring peace between states. This pessimistic and unhelpful view is at the heart of the IR theory of the leading classical realist of the twentieth century, Hans J. Morgenthau.



### 3.2.4 Morgenthau and Classical Realism

According to Morgenthau (1965), men and women are by nature political animals: they are born to pursue power and to enjoy the spoils of power. Morgenthau speaks of the *animus dominandi*: the human ‘lust’ for power (Morgenthau 1965: 192). The craving for power dictates a search not only for relative advantage but also for a secure political space—i.e., territory—to maintain oneself and to enjoy oneself free from the political dictates of others. The ultimate political space within which security can be arranged and enjoyed is, of course, the independent state. Security beyond the state and between states is impossible.

That creates the condition of power politics which is at the heart of Morgenthau’s realism (see Box 3.5). Here, Morgenthau is clearly following Machiavelli and Hobbes. If people desire to enjoy a political space free from the intervention or control of foreigners, they will have to mobilize and deploy their power for that purpose. That is, they will have to organize themselves into a capable and effective state by means of which they can defend their interests. The anarchical system of states invites international conflict which ultimately takes the form of war. To stop or at least constrain this struggle for power among nations, Morgenthau stresses the need for a tempering balance of power among nations, a message echoed by most later realists (see Box 3.6).

The struggle between states leads to the problem of justifying the threat or use of force in human relations. Here we arrive at the central normative doctrine of classical realism. Morgenthau follows in the tradition of Thucydides and Machiavelli: there is one morality for the private sphere and another and very different morality for the public sphere. Political ethics allows some actions that would not be tolerated by private morality. Morgenthau is critical of those theorists and practitioners, such as American President Woodrow Wilson, who believed that it was necessary for political ethics to be brought into line with private ethics.

Morgenthau considers that outlook to be not only ill-advised but also irresponsible; it is not only mistaken intellectually but also fundamentally wrong morally. It is a gross intellectual mistake because it fails to appreciate the important difference between the public sphere of politics on the one hand, and the private sphere or domestic life on the other hand. According to classical realists, this difference is fundamental. As indicated, Machiavelli made that point by noting that if a ruler operated in accordance with

#### BOX 3.5 Key Quotes: Morgenthau on political morality

Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place. The individual may say for himself: ‘*fiat justitia, pereat mundus* (let justice be done even if the world perish)’, but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care.

**Morgenthau (1985: 12)**

**BOX 3.6** Key Quotes: President Nixon on the balance of power (1970)

We must remember the only time in the history of the world that we have had any extended periods of peace is when there has been balance of power. It is when one nation becomes infinitely more powerful in relation to its potential competitor that the danger of war arises. So I believe in a world in which the United States is powerful. I think it will be a safer world and a better world if we have a strong, healthy United States, Europe, Soviet Union, China, Japan, each balancing the other, not playing one against the other, an even balance.

**Quoted from Kissinger (1994: 705)**

Christian private ethics, he or she would come to grief very quickly because political rivals could not be counted on to operate in the same Christian way.

Such a policy would be reckless in the extreme, and would constitute an ethical failure because political leaders bear a heavy responsibility for the security and welfare of their country and its people. They are not supposed to expose their people to unnecessary perils or hardships. Sometimes—for example, during crises or emergencies—it may be necessary to carry out foreign policies and engage in international activities that would clearly be wrong according to private morality: spying, lying, cheating, stealing, conspiring, and so on are only a few of the many activities that would be considered at best dubious and at worst evil by the standards of private morality. Sometimes, it may be necessary to trample on human rights for the sake of the national interest: during war, for example. Sometimes, it may be necessary to sacrifice a lesser good for a greater good or to choose the lesser of two evils. That tragic situation is, for realists, virtually a defining feature of international politics, especially during times of war. Here, Morgenthau is reiterating an insight into the ethically compromised nature of statecraft that was noted by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (1974: 82, 121), who spoke of the ‘noble lie’: ‘Our rulers will probably have to make considerable use of lies and deceit for the good of their subjects.’

The awareness that political ends (e.g., defending the national interest during times of war) must sometimes justify morally questionable or morally tainted means (e.g., the targeting and bombing of cities) leads to situational ethics and the dictates of ‘political wisdom’: prudence, moderation, judgement, resolve, courage, and so on. Those are the cardinal virtues of political ethics. They do not preclude evil actions. Instead, they underline the tragic dimension of international ethics: they recognize the inevitability of moral dilemmas in international politics: that evil actions must sometimes be taken to prevent a greater evil (see Table 3.2).

Morgenthau (1985: 4–17) encapsulates his IR theory in ‘six principles of political realism’. These principles, which we briefly summarize, offer statesmen a veritable political manual. This is probably one of the reasons for the remarkable influence of

**TABLE 3.2** Morgenthau's concept of statecraft

HUMAN NATURE (BASIC CONDITION)	POLITICAL SITUATION (MEANS AND CONTEXT)	POLITICAL CONDUCT (GOALS AND VALUES)
<i>animus dominandi</i>	Power politics	Political ethics (prudence, etc.)
Self-interest	Political power	Human necessities (security, etc.)
	Political circumstances	National interest
	Political skills	Balance of power

Morgenthau's thought particularly in American policy circles in the decades after the Second World War.

- Politics is rooted in a permanent and unchanging human nature which is basically self-centred, self-regarding, and self-interested.
- Politics is 'an autonomous sphere of action' and cannot therefore be reduced to morals (as Kantian or liberal theorists are prone to do).
- Self-interest is a basic fact of the human condition. International politics is an arena of conflicting state interests.
- The ethics of international relations is a political or situational ethics which is very different from private morality. In exercising political responsibility, a political leader may have to violate private morality to defend national security. Not only would that be justifiable, it may be absolutely necessary.
- Realists are opposed to the idea that particular nations can impose their ideologies (e.g., democracy) on other nations. It is fundamentally unwise as, ultimately, it could backfire and threaten the crusading country.
- Statecraft is a sober and uninspiring activity that involves a profound awareness of human limitations and human imperfections.

A number of critics have pointed out that Morgenthau's realist theory of international politics is characterized by internal contradictions. Morgenthau repeatedly claims to have identified 'iron laws' of international politics, which states have to respond to, whether they wish to or not. But at the same time, he repeatedly exhorts statespeople—particularly American statesmen—that they 'ought' to follow his maxims of realism. As Robert W. Tucker (1952) observed in an early review of Morgenthau's book *In Defense of the National Interest*, the 'iron laws' are thus not really iron laws. According to Tucker (1952: 214), Morgenthau tries 'to do the impossible—that is, to deduce value judgments from what he considers to be international political reality' (see also Donnelly 2000: 29). This exposes some of the theoretical difficulties that arise from trying to bridge empirical and normative analysis. These weaknesses also characterize the work of other classical realists, including the English diplomat and international relations scholar E. H. Carr and the American

theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (see Smith 1986; see also Chapter 2). This lack of theoretical refinement and internal theoretical consistency was a key reason that classical realism was at the receiving end of a stark criticism especially in the 1960s and 1970s.

### 3.3 Schelling and Strategic Realism

Classical realists—including Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Morgenthau—provide a normative analysis as well as an empirical analysis of IR. Power is understood to be not only a fact of political life but also a matter of political responsibility. Indeed, power and responsibility are inseparable concepts. For example, the balance of power is not only an empirical statement about the way that world politics are alleged to operate. The balance of power is also a basic value: it is a legitimate goal and a guide to responsible statecraft on the part of the leaders of the great powers. In other words, for classical realists the balance of power is a desirable institution and a good thing to strive for because it upholds the basic values of international peace and security.

Since the 1950s and 1960s, new realist approaches have emerged that are a product of the quest for a social science of IR. This new realism is to a large extent a reaction to the difficulties that arose from classical realists' attempt to, at one and the same time, discover scientific laws and present normative advice on statecraft. Many current realists hold back from providing a normative analysis of world politics because it is deemed to be subjective and thus unscientific. That attitude to the study of values in world politics marks a fundamental divide between classical realists on the one hand and strategic realists, neorealists, and neoclassical realists on the other. In this section, we shall examine **strategic realism**, which is exemplified by the thought of Thomas Schelling (1980, 1996). Schelling does not pay much attention to the normative aspects of realism, although he does notice their presence in the background. In the next section we shall turn to neorealism, which is associated most closely with Kenneth Waltz (1979). Waltz also tends to ignore the normative aspects of realism in his pursuit of a scientific theory.

Strategic realism focuses centrally on foreign-policy decision-making. When state leaders confront basic diplomatic and military issues, they are obliged to think strategically—i.e., instrumentally—if they hope to be successful. Schelling (1980, 1996) seeks to provide analytical tools for strategic thought. He views diplomacy and foreign policy, especially of the great powers and particularly the United States, as a rational-instrumental activity that can be more deeply understood by the application of a form of logical analysis called 'game theory'. He summarizes his thought as shown in Box 3.7.

A central concept that Schelling employs is that of a 'threat': his analysis concerns how statespeople can deal rationally with the threat and dangers of nuclear war. For example, writing about nuclear deterrence, Schelling makes the important observation that:

the efficacy of . . . [a nuclear] threat may depend on what alternatives are available to the potential enemy, who, if he is not to react like a trapped lion, must be left some tolerable recourse. We have come to realize that a threat of all-out retaliation . . . eliminates lesser courses of action and forces him to choose between extremes . . . [and] may induce him to strike first.

**Schelling (1980: 6–7)**

### BOX 3.7 Key Arguments: Schelling on diplomacy

Diplomacy is bargaining: it seeks outcomes that, though not ideal for either party, are better for both than some of the alternatives . . . The bargaining can be polite or rude, entail threats as well as offers, assume a status quo or ignore all rights and privileges, and assume mistrust rather than trust. But . . . there must be some common interest, if only in the avoidance of mutual damage, and an awareness of the need to make the other party prefer an outcome acceptable to oneself. With enough military force a country may not need to bargain.

**Schelling (1980: 168)**

This is a good example of strategic realism which basically concerns how to employ power intelligently in order to get our military adversary to do what we desire and, more importantly, to avoid doing what we fear. According to strategic realism, ‘choosing between extremes’ is foolish and reckless and is thus ill-advised because of the high levels of danger it involves.

Schelling was not the first to think along these lines. The father of game theory, John von Neumann, had already coined the term Mutual Assured Destruction, with the fitting abbreviation MAD, to describe how nuclear weapons increased the cost of war between nuclear powers such as the United States and the Soviet Union (Gartzke and Kroenig 2016: 399). But Schelling, who was an economist by training, revolutionized this line of inquiry by using insights from game theory, and he was to receive the 2005 Nobel Prize in Economics for this work. For Schelling, the activity of foreign policy is a rational, enlightened activity. It is technically instrumental and thus free from moral choice. It is not primarily concerned about what is good or what is right. It concerns the question: what is required for our policy to be successful? One of the crucial instruments of foreign policy for a great power such as the United States is that of armed force. Schelling devotes considerable thought to this issue. He observes an important distinction between brute force and coercion: ‘between taking what you want and making someone give it to you’. He continues:

brute force succeeds when it is used, whereas the power to hurt is most successful when held in reserve. It is the threat of damage . . . that can make someone yield or comply.

**Schelling (1996: 169–70)**

He adds that to make the use of our coercive apparatus effective ‘we need to know what an adversary treasures and what scares him’, and we also need to communicate clearly to him ‘what will cause the violence to be inflicted and what will cause it to be withheld’. There should be no misunderstandings. The actors involved should be acutely aware of the dangers (costs) and opportunities (benefits) they face.

Schelling goes on to make a fundamentally realist point: for coercion to be effective, it ‘requires that our interests and our opponent’s [interests] are not absolutely opposed . . . coercion requires finding a bargain’. Coercion is a method of bringing an adversary into a bargaining relationship and getting the adversary to do what we want him or her to

### BOX 3.8 Key Arguments: Schelling on the diplomacy of violence

The power to hurt is nothing new in warfare, but . . . modern technology . . . enhances the importance of war and threats of war as techniques of influence, not of destruction; of coercion and deterrence, not of conquest and defense; of bargaining and intimidation . . . War no longer looks like just a contest of strength. War and the brink of war are more a contest of nerve and risk-taking, of pain and endurance . . . The threat of war has always been somewhere underneath international diplomacy . . . Military strategy can no longer be thought of . . . as the science of military victory. It is now equally, if not more, the art of coercion, of intimidation and deterrence . . . Military strategy . . . has become the diplomacy of violence.

**Schelling (1996: 168, 182)**

do without having to compel it—i.e., the use of brute force, which is usually far more difficult, far less efficient, and far more dangerous. Schelling (1996: 181) summarizes his analysis of the modern diplomacy of violence in Box 3.8.

There are obviously striking similarities between the thoughts of Machiavelli and those of Schelling. However, the strategic realism of Schelling (1980) does not usually probe the ethics of foreign policy; it merely presupposes basic foreign-policy goals without comment. The normative aspects of foreign policy and the justification of intelligent strategy in a dangerous world of nuclear-armed superpowers are intimated by his argument but largely hidden beneath the surface of his text. Schelling speaks quite readily of the ‘dirty’ and ‘extortionate’ heart of strategic realism. But he does not inquire why that kind of diplomacy could be called ‘dirty’ or ‘extortionate’, and he does not say whether that can be justified. Schelling does not base his instrumental analysis on an underlying political or civic ethics the way that Machiavelli does. The normative values at stake in foreign policy are largely taken for granted. Schelling’s realism is fundamentally different from Machiavelli’s realism in that important respect (see Table 3.3).

**TABLE 3.3** Realist statecraft: instrumental realism and strategic realism

	<b>MACHIAVELLI’S RENAISSANCE STATECRAFT</b>	<b>SHELLING’S NUCLEAR STATECRAFT</b>
<b>Mode</b>	Instrumental realism	Strategic realism
<b>Means</b>	Strength and cunning Opportunism and luck	Intelligence, nerve, and risk-taking Logic and art of coercion
<b>Goals</b>	Security and survival	Security and survival
<b>Values</b>	Civic virtue	Value-neutral; non-prescriptive

Strategic realism thus presupposes values and carries normative implications. Unlike classical realism, however, it does not examine them or explore them. For example, Schelling (1980: 4) is well aware that rational behaviour is motivated not only by a conscious calculation of advantages but also by ‘an explicit and internally consistent value system’. But the role of value systems is not investigated by Schelling beyond making it clear that behaviour is related to values, such as vital national interests. Values are taken as given and treated instrumentally. In other words, the fundamental point of behaving the way that Schelling suggests that foreign policymakers *ought* to behave is not explored, clarified, or even addressed. He provides a strategic analysis but not a **normative theory** of IR. Here we come to a fundamental difference between Schelling and Machiavelli. For Machiavelli, the point was the survival and flourishing of the nation. Classical realists are explicitly concerned about the basic values at stake in world politics; they provide a political and ethical theory of IR. Most realists today are silent about them and seem to take them more or less for granted without commenting on them or building them into their IR theories. They limit their analyses to political structures and processes and they largely ignore political ends.

In recent years, there has been an attempt to systematize the study of effects of nuclear weapons on international relations. The great challenge facing empirical research on nuclear weapons has always been the—otherwise heartening—fact that since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 these weapons have not been used. Recent research tries to solve this challenge by ‘examining observable implications of how nuclear capabilities affect’ e.g., conflict behaviour of states (Gartzke and Kroenig 2016: 400). The point is that nuclear weapons are in a sense ‘used’ on a daily basis as they affect negotiations between states with and without nuclear weapons. This vantage point has allowed scholars to carry out increasingly sophisticated quantitative analysis of the role of nuclear weapons in IR—an approach popularly known as ‘nukes with numbers’ (Gartzke and Kroenig 2016).

### 3.4 Waltz and Neorealism

The leading neorealist thinker is undoubtedly Kenneth Waltz (see Table 3.4). Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics (TIP)* (1979) seeks to provide a scientific explanation of the international political system. He takes some elements of classical realism as a starting point—e.g., independent states existing and operating in a system of international anarchy. But he departs from that tradition by giving no account of human nature and by ignoring the ethics of statecraft. Waltz’s notion of theory has often been misunderstood, even though he devotes an entire chapter to it in *TIP* (Wæver 2009; Jackson 2016: 123–4). According to Waltz’s (1979: 8) famous definition, ‘A theory is a picture, mentally formed, of a bounded realm or domain of activity.’ A theory thus constitutes its own reality and abstracts from the real world in order to make ‘a few big and important things’ in this world easier to understand. A theory, so conceived, cannot be tested up against reality, and it cannot be proven true or false (Waltz 1979: 9). It can also do little to predict specific international outcomes, for two reasons. First, the theory merely identifies a set of structural constraints which mean that certain actions are likely to be

**TABLE 3.4** Waltz's neorealist theory: structure and outcomes

INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURE	INTERNATIONAL OUTCOMES
<i>(state units and relations)</i>	<i>(effects of state competition)</i>
International anarchy	Balance of power
States as 'like units'	International recurrence and repetition
Unequal state capability	International conflict, war
Great power relations	Bipolarity or multipolarity

punished. For instance, international anarchy means that states that fail to strengthen their defence and/or enter alliances risk being conquered or bullied by stronger neighbours. Second, specific predictions require that some of the factors that the theory has abstracted away from are taken into account. For instance, to predict particular foreign-policy decisions, one needs additional knowledge about domestic political processes and possibly about the most important domestic political actors (see Box 3.9). What a theory such as that presented in *TIP* can do is explain that certain types of outcomes tend to recur within the international system, including that international systems are normally characterized by a balance of power between great powers.

In Waltz's view, the best IR theory is one that focuses centrally on the structure of the system, on its interacting units, and on the continuities and changes of the system. In classical realism, state leaders and their international decisions and actions are at the centre of attention. In many liberal theories, the national level—e.g. the political regime form—is emphasized. Waltz dismisses such theories as 'reductionist' and instead proposes what he terms a 'systemic' theory. In neorealism, the structure of the system that

### BOX 3.9 Key Concepts: Waltz on theory

Under most circumstances, a theory of international politics is not sufficient, and cannot be made sufficient, for the explanation of foreign policy. An international political theory can explain states' behaviour only when external pressures dominate the internal disposition of states, which seldom happens. When they do not, a theory of international politics needs help. The help is found outside the theory. Yet it is said that although neorealists admit that unit-level causes are important, they refuse to include them in their accounts. The peculiarity of this criticism is matched by the frequency with which it is made. Obviously, nobody, realist or otherwise, believes that foreign policy and international politics can be understood without considering what goes on inside states. The critics have confused theories and accounts. Accounts, stories about what happens and speculations about why are not theories. Much is included in an account; little is included in a theory.

**Waltz, 'Neorealism: Confusions and Criticisms', 3–4**



is external to the actors, in particular the relative distribution of power, is thus the central analytical focus. Leaders and national level factors are relatively unimportant because structures compel states to act in certain ways. In Waltz's (1979: 73–4) own words, structures 'act as a selector . . . by rewarding some behaviors and punishing others' (see Box 3.10). To that extent, Waltz's theory is shorn of considerations about actors' choices.

Another way of understanding Waltz's view of what a theory does is via the notion of ideal types. An ideal type is a mental construct that rescues the observer from drowning in a complex reality by simplifying it. The purpose is to better understand one or more important aspects of reality, such as international anarchy or the balance of power. Ideal types thus do not describe reality but abstract from it to capture its essence (see Waltz 1979: 89–91; Jackson 2016: 124–5). This means that ideal types are not true or false; they are useful or not useful for understanding something. Drawing on insights from microeconomics about how firms respond to the market mechanism under perfect competition, Waltz offers an ideal type about how states respond to international anarchy. If real-world events do not behave in accordance with this ideal type (as often happens, since reality is specific whereas ideal types are general), the job of the IR scholar is to identify the circumstances that made the real-world outcomes differ (Jackson 2016: 159). This notion of theory separates Waltz from many other contemporary realists, who are inspired by the behaviouralist or positivist ideal that theories prove their worth via sustained empirical testing (Wæver 2009: 203–4; Jackson 2016: 228; see Chapter 2).

Waltz (1959) had already laid some of the foundations for his systemic theory in his earlier book, *Man, the State, and War*. The title signals this book's core contribution, namely to distinguish theories of international relations based on whether they seek answers 'within man, within the structure of the separate states, [or] within the states system' (Waltz 1959: 12). In *Man, the State, and War*, Waltz does not outright dismiss the value of the first two levels and he concedes that it might sometimes be necessary to combine aspects from several levels to accurately understand international relations (e.g., Waltz 1959: 13–14, 160). But he clearly comes down in favour of theories that emphasize system-level attributes and he calls for more systematic efforts to create such theories. His later work in *TIP* can be seen to take up the challenge of presenting such a third level or, in Waltz's own terminology, third image theory (see Chapter 2 for this distinction).

### BOX 3.10 Key Arguments: Waltz on the importance of structure

The ruler's, and later the state's, interest provides the spring of action; the necessities of policy arise from the unregulated competition of states; calculation based on these necessities can discover the policies that will best serve the state's interests; success is the ultimate test of policy, and success is defined as preserving and strengthening the state—structural constraints explain why the methods are repeatedly used despite differences in the persons and states who use them.

**Waltz (1979: 117)**

According to Waltz's neorealist theory, presented in *TIP*, a basic feature of international relations is the decentralized structure of anarchy between states. States are alike in all basic functional respects—i.e., in spite of their different cultures or ideologies or constitutions or histories, they all perform the same basic tasks. All states have to collect taxes, conduct foreign policy, maintain domestic order, and so on. States differ significantly only in regard to their greatly varying capabilities. In Waltz's own words, the state units of an international system are 'distinguished primarily by their greater or lesser capabilities for performing similar tasks . . . the structure of a system changes with changes in the distribution of capabilities across the system's units' (Waltz 1979: 97). International change—for instance, a change from multipolarity (a system with more than two great powers) to bipolarity (a system with two great powers)—occurs when great powers rise and fall and the balance of power shifts accordingly. Waltz's structural theory cannot predict such changes but based on the theory the typical means of change is great-power war. A good example of such fundamental change is the Second World War, which involved the defeat and collapse of Germany and Japan, the decline of Britain and France, and the emergence and domination of the United States and the Soviet Union.

The states that are crucially important for determining changes in the structure of the international system are thus the great powers. A balance of power between states can be achieved, but war is always a possibility in an anarchical system. Waltz distinguishes between bipolar systems—such as existed during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union—and multipolar systems—such as existed both before and after the Cold War. Waltz believes that bipolar systems are more stable and thus provide a better guarantee of peace and security than do multipolar systems. 'With only two great powers, both can be expected to act to maintain the system' (Waltz 1979: 204). That is because in maintaining the system they are maintaining themselves. According to that view, the Cold War was a period of international stability and peace (see Box 3.11).

Unlike Schelling's strategic realism, Waltz's neorealist approach does not provide explicit policy guidance to state leaders as they confront the practical problems of world politics. That is presumably because his theory is so abstract that it can tell us little about how statesmen should act under particular circumstances. In Waltz's own words, neorealism 'does not tell us why state X made a certain move last Tuesday' (Waltz 1979: 121).

Waltz's neorealism thus has little to say about statecraft and diplomacy. His argument is at base a theory in which structure constrains policy. The system works its magic on political actors in two main ways: via socialization and via competition (Waltz 1979: 74). Actors are unlikely to attempt the impossible but if they do so, they, or more particularly their states, are selected out over time, e.g., via warfare and conquest. In this important respect, neorealism is an explicit departure from classical realism, which focuses on the politics and ethics of statecraft (Morgenthau 1985). It is also a departure from Schelling, who assumes rational behaviour of statesmen and focuses centrally on strategic choice.

However, just beneath the surface of Waltz's neorealist text, and occasionally on the surface, there is a recognition of the ethical dimension of international politics which is virtually identical to classical realism. The core concepts that Waltz employs have a

### BOX 3.11 Key Developments: John Gaddis's portrait of the long bipolar peace during the Cold War

1. The post-war bipolar system realistically reflected the facts of where military power resided at the end of World War II . . .
2. The post-1945 bipolar structure was a simple one that did not require sophisticated leadership to maintain it . . .
3. Because of its relatively simple structure, alliances in this bipolar system have tended to be more stable than they had been in the 19th century and in the 1919–39 period. It is striking that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has equalled in longevity the most durable of the pre-World War I alliances, that between Germany and Austria-Hungary; it has lasted almost twice as long as the Franco-Russian alliance, and certainly much longer than any of the tenuous alignments of the interwar period.

In short, without anyone's having designed it . . . the nations of the post-war era locked into a system of international relations that because it has been based upon realities of power, has served the cause of order—if not justice—better than one might have expected.

**Gaddis (1987: 221–2)**

normative aspect. For example, he operates with a concept of state sovereignty: 'To say that a state is sovereign means that it decides for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems' (Waltz 1979: 96). Thus, state sovereignty means being in a position to decide, a condition which is usually signified by the term 'independence': sovereign states are postulated as independent of other sovereign states. But what is independence? Waltz (1979: 88) says that each state is formally 'the equal of all the others. None is entitled to command; none is required to obey.' But to say that states are 'equal' and that independence is an 'entitlement' is to take notice of a *norm* which is acknowledged; in this case the norm of 'equal' state sovereignty. Waltz also assumes that states are worth fighting for. That implies values: those of state security and survival. Indeed, Waltz needs to assume that states seek to survive. Here, we can return to the analogy with microeconomics that Waltz used in *TIP*. Waltz argues that the structure of international political systems is similar to that of economic markets. For this analogy to make sense, Waltz's theory requires an assumption that is equivalent to the notion in neoclassical economics that humans are profit-maximizers. That assumption is that states seek to survive (Donnelly 2000: 51). But unlike the classical realists, Waltz does not explicitly discuss these issues. He simply takes them for granted.

Because Waltz's neorealist theory has been so influential, it has also received a great deal of criticism. The two main objections have been that the theory is too static and too narrow (Buzan, Little, and Jones 1993: 25). The first criticism concerns the inability of neorealism, as conceived by Waltz, to explain change. The static nature of neorealism

was exposed by the end of the Cold War, which overturned the bipolar system that neo-realist theory had argued was very stable, and even did so in the absence of the kind of great power war that Waltz emphasizes. Here, it should be noted that Waltz is unambiguous that his theory explains recurrences rather than changes; to some extent this criticism therefore misses the mark.

The second criticism centres on the extent to which Waltz abstracts away from reality in order to present a purely systemic theory. Critics have argued that Waltz's inability to predict outcomes or at least his 'indeterminate predictions' stem from this narrow theorizing (see e.g., Donnelly 2000). It follows that further elaboration of the theory will enable us to better explain important facets of international relations (Donnelly 2000: 127). This can be done in at least three ways: by expanding what is part of the structure of the international system, by specifying the motives that guide state action, and by integrating domestic factors. The first solution is the one favoured by Buzan, Little, and Jones (1993), the second the one employed by Mearsheimer (1993), and the third the one that Schweller (2004; 2006) uses. We return to these issues when presenting so-called offensive realism (Mearsheimer) and neoclassical realism (Schweller) later in this chapter but we also note that Waltz has argued that those calling for him to augment his theory misunderstand its purpose (see Box 3.9).

One of Waltz's former PhD students, Stephen M. Walt (1985; 1987), in the 1980s attempted to specify the theory in order to overcome the problem with indeterminate predictions. According to Walt, states balance not against power pure and simple but against *threatening* power, or more bluntly against threats. The level of threat that states pose to one another is decided by four factors:

- Aggregate power
- Geographic proximity
- Offensive military capabilities
- Aggressive intentions

Walt emphasizes that it is always an empirical question how these four factors combine—or how they should be weighted—to decide the threat that one state poses to another in a particular situation. But the more general point is that not all states are equally threatening to others, even if they have the same aggregate power. First, states far away pose much less of a threat because the 'ability to project power declines with distance' (Walt 1985: 10), and some states, while powerful in a general sense, do not have threatening offensive power or striking capability. For instance, Japan or Germany might be very powerful economically and also have rather high levels of defensive military capabilities (though they lack nuclear weapons) but they do not have much in terms of offensive military power. Second, states are not identical as their intentions, or more precisely the intentions of their political leaders, must be considered. This explains why France and Germany no longer pose a real threat to one another, or why American decision makers are much more concerned about North Korea's limited number of nuclear missiles than by the United Kingdom's much more impressive nuclear striking force.

By making sense of how power is transformed into threats, Walt is able to more specifically predict which states are likely to balance each other and when they are likely to do so. However, Walt agrees with Waltz that international relations is largely a defensive game as statespeople will attempt to avoid a situation where one state grows overmighty: 'states facing an external threat overwhelmingly prefer to balance against the threat rather than to bandwagon with it' (Walt 1985: 15). Statespeople are cautious because they prefer to preserve their freedom of action and because intentions are by nature malleable; yesterday's friend might turn into tomorrow's enemy. For this reason, Walt is best placed within the 'defensive' theory of neorealism that Waltz has formulated.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that both Waltz and Walt attribute much of the stability of the bipolar system to the existence of nuclear weapons. These weapons increase the cost of war and therefore discipline states, especially great powers, via the threat of mutual assured destruction. As Waltz (1993: 44) himself puts it, 'The longest peace yet known rested on two pillars: bipolarity and nuclear weapons.' However, weaponry is not part of the structure of the international system, meaning that Waltz here introduces a non-structural feature to explain the bipolar stability, or more precisely that the Cold War stayed cold (Donnelly 2000: 110–11). That is to say, Waltz aims for a parsimonious theory [a simple theory based on a few explanatory factors] that focuses on 'big and important things', but in order to explain stable bipolarity he draws in an additional element (nuclear weapons). This shows some of the limits to neorealist theorizing.

### 3.5 Mearsheimer, Stability Theory, and Hegemony

Both strategic realism and neorealism were intimately connected with the Cold War. They were distinctive IR theory responses to that special, if not unique, historical situation. They both sought to apply scientific methods to the theoretical and practical problems posed by the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Schelling tried to show how a notion of strategy based on game theory could shed light on the nuclear rivalry between the two superpowers. Waltz tried to show how a structural analysis could shed light on 'the long peace' (Gaddis 1987) that was produced by the bipolar rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The end of the Cold War and the multipolar condition that is presently emerging thus raises an important question about the future of realist theories that were developed during what could be regarded as an exceptional period of modern international history. In this section, we shall address that question in connection with neorealism.

In a widely discussed essay, John Mearsheimer (1993) takes up the neorealist argument of Waltz (1979) and applies it to both the past and the future. He says that neorealism has continued relevance for explaining international relations; neorealism is a general theory that applies to other historical situations besides that of the Cold War. It is relevant to multipolar situations as much as to bipolar situations of world politics. He also argues that neorealism can be employed to predict the course of international history beyond the Cold War.

Mearsheimer builds on Waltz's (1979: 161–93) argument concerning the stability of bipolar systems as compared with multipolar systems. These two configurations are

considered to be the main structural arrangements of power that are possible among independent states. There are three basic reasons why bipolar systems are more stable and peaceful. First, the number of great-power conflicts is fewer, and that reduces the possibilities of great-power war. Second, it is easier to operate an effective system of deterrence because fewer great powers are involved. Finally, because only two powers dominate the system, the chances of miscalculation and misadventure are lower. There are fewer fingers on the trigger. In short, the two rival superpowers can keep their eye steadily fixed on each other without the distraction and confusion that would occur if there were a larger number of great powers, as was the case prior to 1945 and arguably has been the case since 1990 (Mearsheimer 1993: 149–50).

The question Mearsheimer (1993: 141) poses is: what could be expected to happen when a bipolar system is replaced by a multipolar system? How would such a basic system change affect the chances for peace and the dangers of war in post-Cold War Europe? The answer Mearsheimer gives is as follows:

the prospects for major crises and war in Europe are likely to increase markedly if . . . this scenario unfolds. The next decades in a Europe without the superpowers would probably not be as violent as the first 45 years of this century [an era of two world wars], but would probably be substantially more prone to violence than the past 45 years [the era of the Cold War].

**Mearsheimer (1993: 142)**

What is the basis for that pessimistic prediction? Mearsheimer (1993: 142–3) argues that the distribution and nature of military power are the main sources of war and peace and says, specifically, that ‘the long peace’ between 1945 and 1990 was a result of three fundamentally important conditions: the bipolar system of military power in Europe; the approximate military equality between the United States and the Soviet Union; and the fact that both of the rival superpowers were equipped with an imposing arsenal of nuclear weapons. The withdrawal of the superpowers from the European heartland would give rise to a multipolar system consisting of five major powers (Germany, France, Britain, Russia, and perhaps Italy) as well as a number of minor powers. That system would be ‘prone to instability’. ‘The departure of the superpowers would also remove the large nuclear arsenals they now maintain in Central Europe. This would remove the pacifying effect that these weapons have had on European politics’ (Mearsheimer 1993: 143).

Thus, according to Mearsheimer (1993: 187), the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union ‘was principally responsible for transforming a historically violent region into a very peaceful place’ (see Table 3.5). Mearsheimer argues that the demise of the bipolar Cold War order and the emergence of a multipolar Europe will produce a highly undesirable return to the bad old ways of European anarchy and instability and even a renewed danger of international conflict, crisis, and possibly war. He makes the following highly controversial point:

The West has an interest in maintaining peace in Europe. It therefore has an interest in maintaining the Cold War order, and hence has an interest in the continuation of the Cold War confrontation; developments that threaten to end it are dangerous.

**Mearsheimer (1993: 332)**

TABLE 3.5 Mearsheimer's neorealist stability theory

CONDITIONS OF STABLE BIPOLARITY	CONDITIONS OF UNSTABLE MULTIPOLARITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Europe during the Cold War</li> <li>• Two superpowers</li> <li>• Rough superpower equality</li> <li>• Nuclear deterrence</li> <li>• Conquest is difficult</li> <li>• Superpower discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Europe before 1945 and after 1990</li> <li>• Several great powers</li> <li>• Unequal and shifting balances of power</li> <li>• Conventional military rivalry</li> <li>• Conquest is less difficult and more tempting</li> <li>• Great power indiscipline and risk-taking</li> </ul>

In the same vein as Waltz, Mearsheimer regards the behaviour of states as shaped if not indeed determined by the anarchical *structure* of international relations. He differs from Waltz, however, whom he characterizes as a 'defensive realist'; i.e., someone who recognizes that states seek power in order to be secure and to survive, but who believes that excessive power is counterproductive, because it provokes other states to balance by arms build-up and alliance formation. For Waltz, it does not make sense to strive for excessive power beyond that which is necessary for security and survival. Mearsheimer thus speaks of Waltz's theory as '**defensive realism**', an umbrella term that also captures Walt's specification of Waltz's work.

Mearsheimer agrees with Waltz and Walt that anarchy compels states to compete for power. However, he argues that states seek hegemony, that they are ultimately more aggressive than Waltz and Walt portray them. The goal for a country such as the United States is to dominate the entire system, because only in that way can it rest assured that no other state or combination of states would even think about going to war against it. All major powers strive for that ideal situation. This can be understood as an attempt to inject a more specific assumption of state motivation into neorealism, and thereby make it easier to use the theory to predict (Donnelly 2000: 63). But Mearsheimer qualifies his argument by noting that the planet is too big for global hegemony. The oceans are huge barriers. No state would have the necessary power. Mearsheimer therefore argues that states can only become the hegemon in their own region of the world. In the Western hemisphere, for example, the United States has long been by far the most powerful state. No other state—Canada, Mexico, Brazil—would even think about threatening or employing armed force against the United States.

Regional hegemons can see to it, however, that there are no similar regional hegemons in any other part of the world. They can prevent the emergence and existence of a peer competitor which might try to interfere in a regional hegemon's sphere of influence and control. According to Mearsheimer, that is what the United States is trying to do. For two centuries, since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the United States has endeavoured to ensure that no great power intervened militarily in the Western hemisphere. The United States confronted Imperial Germany in the First World War, Nazi Germany in the Second World War, and the Soviet Union in the Cold War, because if any of those



states had gained hegemony in Europe, it would be free to intervene in the Western hemisphere, and possibly threaten the security of the United States.

According to Mearsheimer, all states want to become regional hegemons. His neorealist theory postulates that Germany will become the dominant European state and that China will likely emerge as a potential hegemon in Asia. If that were to happen, one would also expect the United States to try to prevent or undercut Chinese power in East Asia. Indeed, if China became a peer competitor, the United States could be expected to go to great lengths to contain China's influence and prevent China from intervening in other regions of the world where American national interests are at stake. That is why Mearsheimer refers to his theory as '**offensive realism**', which rests on the assumption that great powers 'are always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal' (Mearsheimer 2001: 29). Mearsheimer, like other realists, believes that his argument has general application to all places at all times. There has always been and there will always be a struggle between nation-states for power and domination in the international system. And there is nothing that anyone can do to prevent it. International struggle and conflict between great powers are inevitable. This is why the title of one of his books is *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

In his most recent book, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, Mearsheimer (2018) uses this tragic conception of international relations to understand the present difficulties of the liberal international order that has been created since the demise of the Soviet Union (see also Mearsheimer 2019). Mearsheimer points out that this order has only been possible because we have lived through a moment of unipolarity since 1989, where the leading state, the US, has been a liberal democracy willing to prop up liberal values and institutions abroad. However, he argues that this US-led liberal order was bound to fail because the active attempt to spread liberal democracy begets opposition and sometimes leads to disastrous wars which weaken the liberal hegemon. As Mearsheimer bluntly observes:

Washington's performance in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Libya and Syria has been dismal. Not only has the United States failed to protect human rights and promote liberal democracy in those countries, it has played a major role in spreading death and disorder across the greater Middle East.

**Mearsheimer (2018: 168)**

Meanwhile, the lofty international ambitions tend to overshadow or even aggravate pressing domestic concerns, and they therefore spark internal opposition from citizens who feel that they are footing the bill for making the world democratic. In sum, the universalistic liberal foreign policy is self-defeating, it creates more problems than it solves, and the prudent great power is one that abstains from such foreign misadventures, even if it has hegemonic power. Perhaps most problematically, liberal overreach has weakened US ability to confront the rise of China in order to avoid that it achieves regional hegemony in Asia, to the detriment of American interests.

Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism has come in for criticism from many quarters. It has been criticized for failing to explain peaceful change and cooperation between great powers, such as between Britain and the United States for the past century and



longer. It has also been pointed out that even if international anarchy persists, states today have little reason to fear for their survival. In the period since the Second World War, international norms and institutions have developed that safeguard sovereign statehood. There are virtually no examples of states conquering and annexing other states these days. It has been argued that survival is a relatively unimportant motive for states in today's world (Donnelly 2000: 147), in part because nuclear weapons have made great power warfare an anachronism (Layne 2019). Mearsheimer's notion that great powers are would-be hegemonies, bent on conquering whole states or taking a slice of their territory and extracting resources from them, does not fit this reality very well.

A related criticism of Mearsheimer's theory is its deficiency in empirical perceptiveness and subtlety. Mearsheimer sees no significant difference in the current and future power relationships between states in Western Europe as compared with those in East Asia. Here, it has been pointed out:

he is at odds with that more famous realist, Henry Kissinger who, in his book *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?*, convincingly argues that for the foreseeable future there is little or no likelihood of the nations of Western Europe going to war with each other or with the United States, but that war is much more possible among the nations of Asia or between America and Asian powers.

**Sempa (2009: 90)**

Mearsheimer's offensive realist theory has also been criticized for failing to look at historical experiences that are contrary to his thesis. For instance, Kirshner (2012) argues that Mearsheimer's attempt to specify the motivations of state leaders fails to recognize that while there are clear advantages in being a regional hegemon, historically it has proved very dangerous to try to become one. In fact, the United States is the only successful example in modern history. Other would-be hegemonies, such as Germany and Japan in the twentieth century, paid a huge price for their aborted attempts, something that rational statesmen are likely to consider. This can be taken as support for the more classical realist argument that the US should seek to accommodate rising Chinese power rather than confront it, as Mearsheimer's theory suggests (Kirshner 2012; Layne 2019).

Mearsheimer's (2018) recent book, *The Great Delusion*, has also been criticized for missing broader historical patterns and thus lacking in nuance. William Wohlforth (2019) points out that Mearsheimer only focuses on one historical incident: the US unipolar moment after 1989. But a broader historical analysis reveals that virtually all regimes attempt to reshape the world in their image if they have the power to do so. A good example is revolutionary France, which first exported its new republican model, then—after Napoleon Bonaparte's ascendancy—'bonapartist' monarchy. If anything, liberalism is probably less aggressive than other ideologies in this respect. Had the Soviet Union won the Cold War, it would have pushed its ideology on other countries in a much more forceful way. But Mearsheimer ignores this because he does not compare the situation after 1989 with anything. With a single case, he can say very little about the distinctiveness of liberal universalism as a foreign policy. Finally, it has been pointed out that Mearsheimer fails to recognize a number of empirical regularities, including the fact that liberal democracies have never gone to war against each other (Snyder

2019). Critics have also objected that he exaggerates the extent to which US foreign policy after 1989 was in reality guided by liberalism and not by national self-interest, for instance during the Iraq War of 2003 (Pitts 2019; Snyder 2019).

At the same time, such subtlety and nuance would make the theory less parsimonious. The theory would then have to include several different explanatory elements in order to accurately make sense of the events of the past. That is not what neorealist scholars such as Mearsheimer and Waltz aim for. They want to focus on explaining ‘a few big and important things’.

### 3.6 Neoclassical Realism

The criticism that neorealism is too narrow has paved the way for an attempt to frame a realist theory that combines elements of neorealism with elements of classical realism within one analytical framework. Like the versions of realism already discussed, this one rests upon the assumption that IR is basically an anarchical system. It draws upon neorealism, and that of Waltz in particular, by acknowledging the significance of the structure of the international state system and the relative power of states. It also draws upon classical realism by emphasizing the importance of domestic factors. If we return to Waltz’s (1959) three levels of analysis, **neoclassical realism** thus attempts to include all three, but it does so with particular emphasis on the national and the international level. The first image, human nature, which plays such an important role in classical realism, is at best emphasized in passing, e.g. via the notion of the importance of national leadership and the ways in which individual statesmen perceive the nature of the foreign threats they face. Neoclassical realists thereby attempt to come up with a realist theory that can respond positively to some of the arguments associated with liberalism (see Chapter 4). Randall Schweller (2006: 6), to whom we return below, sums up the neoclassical approach as follows:

states assess and adapt to changes in their external environment partly as a result of their peculiar domestic structures and political situations. More specifically, complex domestic political processes act as transmission belts that channel, mediate, and (re)direct policy outputs in response to external forces (primarily changes in relative power).

Advocates of neoclassical realism take a middle-of-the-road view: that state leadership operates and foreign policy is carried on within the overall constraints or ‘broad parameters’ of the anarchical structure of international relations (Rose 1998: 144).

Neoclassical realists clearly want to retain the structural argument of neorealism. But they also want to add to it the instrumental (policy or strategy) argument of the role of foreign policy decision makers and to factor in internal characteristics of states, on which classical realism places its emphasis (see Table 3.6).

Neoclassical realists argue that ‘anarchy gives states considerable latitude in defining their security interests, and the relative distribution of power merely sets parameters for grand strategy’ (Lobell et al. 2009: 7). In other words, anarchy and the relative power of states do not dictate the specific foreign policies of state leaders. However, neoclassical realists also argue that ‘leaders who consistently fail to respond to systemic incentives put their state’s very survival at risk’ (Lobell et al. 2009: 7). That is to say, international

**TABLE 3.6** Classical realism, neorealism, and neoclassical realism

	CLASSICAL	NEOREALISM	NEOCLASSICAL
Anarchy	Yes	Yes	Yes
State power	Yes	Yes	Yes
Leadership	Yes	No	Yes
Statecraft ethics	Yes	No	No
Human nature	Yes	No	No
Domestic society	No	No	Yes
Social science	No	Yes	Yes

structure (anarchy and the balance of power) constrains states but it does not ultimately specify leadership policies and actions. Faced with anarchy, state behaviour is conditional on domestic preferences (see also Møller 2014). In particular, neoclassical realists emphasize four clusters of domestic variables: strategic culture, the images and perceptions of foreign policy decision makers, domestic institutions, and state-society relations (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016: 59–79).

This way of portraying the structural situation in which foreign policy decision makers find themselves in their conduct of foreign policy—there are constraints of relative power but there is also latitude for choice—seems rather similar to classical realism. The difference between the two concerns the interest in normative aspects of IR. Classical realists—like Morgenthau or Kissinger—will want to judge leadership success or failure in relation to ethical standards: do leaders live up to their responsibilities or not? Neoclassical realists focus on explaining what goes on in terms of the pressures of international structure on the one hand and the decisions made by state leaders on the other. Neoclassical realism also seeks to introduce an element that all other realists ignore or downplay in their analyses: namely internal characteristics of states. Neoclassical realism:

seeks to explain why, how, and under what conditions the internal characteristics of states—the extractive and mobilization capacity of politic-military institutions, the influence of domestic societal actors and interest groups, the degree of state autonomy from society, and the level of elite or societal cohesion—intervene between the leaders' assessment of international threats and opportunities and the actual diplomatic, military, and foreign economic policies those leaders pursue.

**Lobell et al. (2009: 4)**

Do neoclassical realists succeed in their endeavour to create a realist foreign policy theory? On the one hand, neoclassical realists have filled out the void left by the neorealist theories and explained why foreign policy sometimes deviates from the predictions of these theories (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016: 26–31). On the other hand, neoclassical realists continue to grapple with the challenge of avoiding ad hoc explanations and systematically combining the structural factors of the international

system (anarchy, polarity) with domestic policy processes and the perceptions of foreign policy decision makers (Wivel 2017).

A key contribution illustrating the achievements as well as the challenges of neoclassical realism has been made by Randal Schweller (2004; 2006), who proposes a theory of ‘underbalancing’. Schweller’s puzzle is why many states fail to respond effectively to external threats. International anarchy incentivizes them to counter such threats but history is replete with examples of states that did not do so (see also Chapter 11). Schweller argues that this happens because state-society relations condition whether states balance external threats or instead ‘underbalance’, that is, fail to respond adequately to dangerous accumulation of power by other states. Underbalancing happens when there are important divisions within society due to low social cohesion and/or divided elites. Such divisions might even make part of the population ‘actively collaborate with the enemy or remain passive rather than resist the aggressor’ (Schweller 2004: 179). Therefore, only when state-society relations fit the standard neorealist model of the unitary actor can we expect that external threats lead to effective balancing.

That kind of analysis is inspired by liberal approaches to IR (see Chapter 4), which emphasize the importance of domestic conditions of countries in seeking to explain international relations and foreign policies. This contrasts sharply with all other realist approaches, including both neorealism and classical realism. The advantage of neoclassical realism is that an additional element which is relevant for explaining IR is included in the theory. The possible drawback is that the theory becomes less parsimonious, more complex, and more oriented towards including a large number of different elements in the analysis. These pros and cons are reflected in recent debates about the explanatory purchase of neoclassical realism (e.g., Narizny 2017; Smith 2019).

### 3.7 Rethinking the Balance of Power

For classical realists, probably the greatest responsibility of statesmen is to maintain a balance of military power among the great powers to prevent any great power from getting out of control and attempting to impose its political and military will on everybody else. For neorealists, the balance of power is virtually what defines the international system. In the words of Waltz (1979: 117), ‘If there is any distinctively political theory of international politics, balance-of-power theory is it.’

In classical realist thinking, the balance of power is a valued political objective that promotes national security, upholds order among great powers, and makes the independence of states and their peoples possible. The Second World War can readily be seen in this light: Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan made a bid to impose their separate hegemonies on Europe and Asia; and Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States formed an alliance to counter those attempts and restore a balance of power. The Cold War is generally portrayed as a bipolar balance of power based on nuclear weapons and often referred to as a balance of terror—between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Consequently, the end of the Cold War led many statesmen and scholars alike to envisage a new world order based on political freedom and economic progress which would not require any balance of terror. That hope did not last long. With the outbreak of various

armed conflicts in the 1990s, some scholars began to speak of stable Cold War bipolarity being replaced by unstable post-Cold War multipolarity. That led to new IR scholarship which attempted to account for those post-Cold War conflicts in balance of power terms. More recently, it has been suggested that the conflict in Ukraine is evidence of a new cold war between Russia and the West (the United States and the European Union).

We can only summarize the main points of these arguments. Some scholars used the occasion to mount a root-and-branch assault on the relevance of classical balance of power theory to our understanding of world history. We return to this debate in Chapter 11. Others argued that the post-Cold War conflicts called for new conceptions of ‘balance’ and ‘balancing’ and thus for new theories of the balance of power.

Here, we note that while classical power balancing has by no means ended, there are some signs that it is less relevant than it used to be. The European Union has proved remarkably successful in establishing what now looks like ‘perpetual peace’ between Germany and France, arguably the EU’s greatest achievement. And peaceful cooperation between the European great powers in the EU did not end with the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the common enemy, the Soviet Union.

If classical power balancing has decreased in importance, what might have taken its place? This brings us to the distinction between a hard balance of power and a soft balance of power. The former is the classical realist concept of a balance of military power between major powers. The latter, on the other hand, is a more recent conception of liberal theorists. In this theory, the military power of states or international organizations—e.g., alliances—is not the main focus, as it is for both classical realists and International Society theorists. Rather, it emphasizes tacit or informal institutional collaboration or ad hoc cooperation among states for the purpose of joint security against a foreign threat. The concept clearly seeks to enlarge the focus of the balance of power, to include arrangements that are seen to be significant non-military ways in which major powers interact that cushion, assuage, or ease their relations which would otherwise be more antagonistic, uncompromising, and hostile.

The liberal notion of a soft balance of power has been the subject of much critical analysis. One important critique is the charge that the concept ‘stretches’ the notion of the balance of power to the point of making it so elastic and diverse that its core meaning is lost sight of (Nexon 2009).

Where does this discussion leave the balance of power concept? Some proponents of the soft balance of power argue that it encapsulates more of the ways that power is balanced. It is thus more faithful to reality, more accurate, and more empirical. The critics in the section on strategic realism have already had their say, that soft power theory muddies the waters and confuses our understanding of the balance of power, rather than enhancing it. We leave it to you to decide. What is clear, however one decides, is that the balance of power theory in IR is still very much alive and kicking (see esp. Paul et al. 2004; Kaufman et al 2007; Nexon 2009; Møller 2014, 2020; Nedal and Nexon 2019; see also Chapter 11).

### 3.8 Research Prospects and Programme

Realism is a research programme that concerns, first, the security problems of sovereign states in an international anarchy, and, second, the problem of international order. The normative core of realism is state survival and national security. Probably the most persistent

criticism of realism is that it offers a set of negative insights: It identifies a number of constraints on what statespeople can do and argues rather convincingly that there are limits to what kind of progress can be achieved on the supranational level. It offers little to those who wish to change the often dismal state of affairs in international relations. However, if world politics continues to be organized on the basis of independent states with a small group of powerful states largely responsible for shaping the most important international events, then it seems clear that realism will continue to be an important IR research programme. The only historical development that could render it obsolete is a world historical transformation that involved abandoning the sovereign state and the anarchical state system.

That does not appear very likely in the foreseeable future. The often-heralded declaration of the death of the independent state and thus of the anarchical state system (e.g., Linklater 1989; Booth 1991), like the famous mistaken announcement of the death of Mark Twain, is premature. People across the world in their almost countless millions continue to cling to the state as their preferred form of political organization. We need only recall the powerful attraction of self-determination and political independence based on the state for the peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East during the demise of European colonialism and for the peoples of Eastern Europe during the demise of the Soviet empire. When states fragment—as in the case of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War—the fragments turn out to be new (or old) states—e.g., Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo. In historical terms, all these major movements towards the sovereign state occurred recently—i.e., in the late twentieth or early twenty-first centuries. Security continues to be based primarily on the state and the state system. It is not based on a global political–legal organization—such an entity does not exist; nor is there any indication that it is beckoning in the future.

It is also necessary to mark the continuing significance of the major states. Realists underline the centrality of great powers in world politics. Great-power relations shape the international relations and influence the foreign policies of most other states. That is why realists concentrate their attention on the great powers. There is little reason to doubt that the United States, China, Japan, Russia, Germany, France, Britain, India, and a few other core states will continue to perform leading roles in world politics. There also is little reason to doubt that the people of the world depend on those states, before all others, to maintain international peace and security. There is nobody else to provide that fundamental service.

This chapter has discussed the main strands of realism; a major distinction was made between classical realism on the one hand and strategic realism and neorealism on the other. Which strand of realism contains the most promising research programme? John Mearsheimer (1993) says that neorealism is a general theory that applies to other historical situations besides that of the Cold War. He argues that neorealism can be employed to predict the course of international history after the Cold War. We have noted that neorealism formulates a number of important questions about the distribution of power in the international system and the power balancing of the leading powers. Yet, we have also emphasized some limitations of neorealist theory, especially as regards the analysis of cooperation and integration in Western Europe after the end of the Cold War. Some neorealists think that these patterns of cooperation can be addressed without major difficulty through the further development of neorealist analysis (see, for example, Grieco 1997). From a more sceptical view, neorealism (and also strategic realism) appear closely tied to the special historical circumstances of the East–West conflict: (1) a bipolar system

based on two rival superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union) each implacably opposed to the other and prepared to risk war for the sake of its ideology; and (2) the development of nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them to any point on earth.

Since the end of the Cold War the Soviet Union has disappeared and the bipolar system has given way to one in which there are several major powers. The United States is arguably now the only superpower. This remains the case even though Putin's Russia appears to challenge it. It seems clear that Russia in the twenty-first century is a belligerent regional (Eastern European) power and no longer a world power in the way that it once was. With the rise of China, however, the current pre-eminent position of the United States in international relations might come to an end at some point in the not too distant future. That still remains to be seen (see Chapter 12).

Nuclear weapons remain in existence, of course, but the tight Cold War controls on them may have been loosened. There are a number of states, besides the United States, Russia, and China, which possess or may soon possess (in the case of Iran) nuclear arms. There is now an even greater danger of the spread of nuclear weapons than there was during the Cold War. Some strategic realists (such as Schelling) might see that development as dangerous, because there would be more fingers on the nuclear weapons trigger. However, Waltz and Mearsheimer view such a development as reducing the risk of war and increasing the prospects of peace. That is because every nuclear power is mutually terrified and thus unlikely to risk a nuclear conflagration. Thus, nuclear proliferation is conducive to bringing about a more peaceful world (Layne 2019). Different realists clearly can hold different views on matters of supreme importance in world politics.

Finally, it is worthwhile dispelling a common misunderstanding about the realist research programme, namely that most realists are warmongers. On the contrary, the prudence so valued by classical realists as well as the constant asking of whether a certain policy is in the national interest has made many realists—classical as well as contemporary—very hesitant to advocate the use of military force. E. H. Carr defended appeasement against Hitler on this basis, and Morgenthau, together with Reinhold Niebuhr and George Kennan, spoke out against the war in Vietnam, which they believed not to be in the US national interest. Kennan opposed militarization of his famous containment strategy against the Soviet Union, and hence criticized the founding of NATO (Smith 1986). More recently, a number of realists—including John Mearsheimer, Robert Gilpin, and Stephen Walt—warned against the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq in 2003, and Kenneth Waltz was a long-standing critic of military deployment in places that he saw as peripheral to US interests. Realists argue that the caution they recommend is the best shield against military misadventures and that foreign policy blunders normally occur when a moralistic foreign policy prevails.

### 3.9 Integrating International and Domestic Factors

As we have shown in this chapter, realism is internally divided into many different strands, each with their own adjective (classical, strategic, structural, neo-, offensive, defensive, and neoclassical), and with each strand emphasizing different explanatory factors. This is vividly illustrated when we assess the extent to which realists have been



successful in combining international or system-level factors with domestic or national-level factors. Classical realists attempted to straddle this divide by anchoring their analysis in both human nature and international anarchy. However, at the end of the day, the work of Morgenthau and other classical realists was primarily premised on a particular, pessimistic view of what makes men and women tick. In *Man, the State, and War*, Waltz (1959: 40) pointed out that the problem with this approach was that ‘human nature is so complex that it can justify every hypothesis we may entertain’. He illustrated this by showing that what he termed ‘pessimists’ (a category that includes Morgenthau) and ‘optimists’ (a category that includes many liberals) reach fundamentally different conclusions based on human nature. That is, predictions made solely on the basis of this ‘first image’ become indeterminate. Here, one is tempted to quote Immanuel Kant’s famous quip that ‘Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made’, i.e., people can be induced to hold very different convictions (see also Berlin 1969).

Structural realism can be understood as an attempt to solve this by abstracting away from human nature—indeed from any domestic factor—in order to solely emphasize the international level of analysis. Waltz (1979) purposely shies away from combining levels, and Mearsheimer likewise argues that international anarchy means that states behave alike, despite differences in political regime forms, cultural traditions, or levels of socioeconomic development. Donnelly (2000: 50) terms this attempt to understand international relations shorn of considerations about domestic factors ‘the structural dodge’, and it has repeatedly faced criticism. As we have seen, it has been objected that Waltz’s predictions become very weak, indeed indeterminate, because he does not factor in how domestic factors condition external pressure. Mearsheimer’s offensive realism represents an attempt to overcome this problem by refining the structural argument, or more precisely by specifying the neorealist assumption about state motivations. Much the same is attempted by Walt’s more specific focus on geographical proximity, offensive military capabilities, and aggressive intentions. But here, too, the domestic level is slighted.

Structural realists claim that this way of proceeding is necessary to present a genuine theory of international relations rather than simply describing reality using abstract terms. But they concede that to make specific predictions, or even just to make sense of specific situations that have occurred, a purely structural theory needs to enlist a theory of foreign policy. Neoclassical realism can be seen as an attempt to do this in a more systematic fashion, rather than in the ad hoc way that Waltz favours. Neoclassical realists accordingly try to combine international and domestic factors into an integrative explanatory framework. We see this combination as the most promising approach to the outside-inside problem within the realist research programme. However, as mentioned in the discussion of neoclassical realism, there are also potential downsides to this way of solving the problem. It is a complicated task to bring the two levels of analysis together, and we are moving away from the ‘big and important things’ towards a complex reality where many different elements play a role (see Box 3.9 earlier). Neoclassical realists need to face this issue head-on to convince sceptics that they are presenting a genuine theory of international relations.



## ✧ Key points

- Realists usually have a pessimistic view of human nature. Realists are sceptical that there can be progress in international politics that is comparable to that in domestic political life. They operate with a core assumption that world politics consists of an international anarchy of sovereign states. Realists see international relations as basically conflictual, and they see international conflicts as ultimately resolved by war.
- Realists believe that the goal of attaining power, the means of power, and the uses of power are central preoccupations of political activity. International politics is thus portrayed as 'power politics'. The conduct of foreign policy is an instrumental activity based on the intelligent calculation of one's power and one's interests as against the power and interests of rivals and competitors.
- Realists have a high regard for the values of national security, state survival, and international order and stability. They usually believe that there are no international obligations in the moral sense of the word—i.e., bonds of mutual duty—between independent states. For classical realists there is one morality for the private sphere and another and very different morality for the public sphere. Political ethics allows some actions that would not be tolerated by private morality.
- Realists place a great deal of importance on the balance of power, which is both an empirical concept concerning the way that world politics are seen to operate and a normative concept: it is usually a structural concept of a system of states, but it is also a legitimate goal and a guide to responsible statecraft on the part of the leaders of the great powers. It keeps great powers under control, and upholds the basic values of peace and security.
- Realism is best seen as a general research programme rather than a particular theory. Realists of different stripes disagree with each other. A general distinction can be made between classical realism and social science realism, and the latter can be subdivided into strategic realism, structural realism (including offensive and defensive realism), and neoclassical realism.
- Schelling seeks to provide analytical tools for strategic thought. He views diplomacy and foreign policy, especially of the great powers and particularly the United States, as a rational-instrumental activity that can be more deeply understood by the application of a form of mathematical analysis called 'game theory'. Coercion is a method of bringing an adversary into a bargaining relationship and getting the adversary to do what we want him or her to do without having to compel it—i.e., employ brute force, which, in addition to being dangerous, is usually far more difficult and far less efficient.
- Structural realists employ the concepts bipolar system and multipolar system, and many see bipolarity as more conducive to international order.
- Neorealism is an attempt to explain international relations in scientific terms by reference to the unequal capabilities of states and the anarchical structure of the state system, and by focusing on the great powers whose relations determine the most important 'outcomes' of international politics. Waltz, Walt, and Mearsheimer believe that bipolar systems are more stable and thus provide a better guarantee of peace and security than multipolar systems. According to that view, the Cold War was a period of international stability and peace.

- Neoclassical realists seek to combine the structuralist argument of Waltz with the classical realist emphasis on domestic factors. They also seek to incorporate the concepts of domestic statehood and society, which are a characteristic feature of liberalism.
- Some IR theorists employ the distinction between a hard balance of power and a soft balance of power. The former is the classical realist concept of military balance between major powers. The latter, on the other hand, is a more recent, liberal conception of a many-faceted and more diverse balance of power.
- The different strands of realism have encountered different criticisms. Classical realists such as Morgenthau have been criticized for an inability to distinguish between normative and positive analysis and for anchoring their views of the international relations solely on human nature. Structural realists have been criticized for slighting domestic factors in order to solely operate at the systemic level and for their inability to explain international change. Neoclassical realists have been criticized for failing to consider whether it is possible to integrate systemic-level and national-level factors in a unified theoretical framework without turning a theory into a descriptive account of what happened in a particular situation.

## ? Questions

- Realists are pessimistic about human progress and cooperation beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. What are the reasons given for that pessimism? Are they good reasons?
- Why do realists place so much emphasis on security? Does that make sense? How important is security in world politics?
- Identify the major differences between the classical realism of Hans Morgenthau and the neorealism of Kenneth Waltz. Which approach is best suited for analysing international relations after the Cold War?
- According to Morgenthau, a statesman cannot say 'let justice be done even if the world perish' (*fiat justitia, pereat mundus*). Do you agree?
- What is the gist of Waltz's notion of theory? How does this set him apart from other structural realists?
- How do Mearsheimer and Walt, respectively, specify Waltz's theory? Which of the three versions of neorealism do you find more convincing?
- Are states relentless power-maximizers bent on becoming regional hegemons, as Mearsheimer claims, or do they merely fend for their own security, as Waltz and Walt argue?
- Outline the main arguments for and against NATO expansion. State your own position including supporting arguments.
- Is the role of Putin's Russia in Ukraine evidence of a new Cold War?
- Does the concept of a soft balance of power make sense?
- Does the argument of neoclassical realism contain a basic contradiction?
- Is it possible to combine international and domestic factors in a coherent theory of international politics? What are the arguments for and against such a general theory?

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# CHAPTER 4

## Liberalism

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## Summary

This chapter sets forth the liberal tradition in IR. Basic liberal assumptions are: (1) a positive view of human nature; (2) a conviction that international relations can be cooperative rather than conflictual; and (3) a belief in progress. In their conceptions of international cooperation, liberal theorists emphasize different features of world politics. Sociological liberals highlight transnational non-governmental ties between societies, such as communication between individuals and between groups. Interdependence liberals pay particular attention to economic ties of mutual exchange and mutual dependence between peoples and governments. Institutional liberals underscore the importance of organized cooperation between states; finally, republican liberals argue that liberal democratic constitutions and forms of government are of vital importance for inducing peaceful and cooperative relations between states. The chapter discusses these four strands of liberal thought and a debate with neorealism which has given rise to a distinction between weak and strong liberalism. The concluding section evaluates how the liberal tradition has attempted to integrate domestic-level and system-level explanatory factors.

## 4.1 Introduction: Basic Liberal Assumptions

The previous chapter introduced the realist tradition, with its focus on power and conflict. This chapter is about the sharply contrasting liberal view. How can liberals be 'optimistic' about IR? Why do they see a more peaceful world down the road? What are their arguments and beliefs?

The liberal tradition in IR is closely connected with the emergence of the modern liberal state. Liberal philosophers, beginning with John Locke in the seventeenth century, saw great potential for human progress in modern civil society and the capitalist economy, both of which could flourish in states which guaranteed individual liberty (Fawcett 2018). Modernity projects a new and better life, free of authoritarian government, and with a much higher level of material welfare (see Box 4.1).

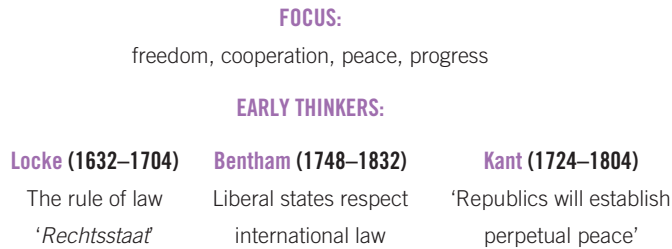
The process of modernization unleashed by the scientific revolution led to improved technologies and thus more efficient ways of producing goods and mastering nature. That was reinforced by the liberal intellectual revolution which had great faith in human reason and rationality. Here is the basis for the liberal belief in progress: the modern liberal state invokes a political and economic system that will bring, in Jeremy Bentham's famous phrase, 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'.

Liberals generally take a positive view of human nature. They have great faith in human reason and they are convinced that rational principles can be applied to international affairs. Liberals recognize that individuals are self-interested and competitive up to a point. But they also believe that individuals share many interests and can engage in collaborative and cooperative social action, domestically as well as internationally, which results in greater benefits for everybody at home and abroad. In other words, conflict and war are not inevitable; when people are guided by reason, they can achieve mutually beneficial cooperation not only within states but also across international boundaries. But liberal theorists disagree about the significance of the obstacles that block the way to human progress (Smith 1992: 204). For some liberals it is a long-term process with many setbacks; for others, success is just around the corner. However, all

### BOX 4.1 Key Developments: Modernization

Between 1780 and 1850, in less than three generations, a far-reaching revolution, without precedent in the history of Mankind, changed the face of England. From then on, the world was no longer the same. The Industrial Revolution transformed Man from a farmer-shepherd into a manipulator of machines worked by inanimate energy . . . [It] opened up a completely different world of new and untapped sources of energy such as coal, oil, electricity and the atom. From a narrow technological point of view, the Industrial Revolution can be defined as the process by which a society gained control of vast sources of inanimate energy; but such a definition does not do justice to this phenomenon . . . as regards its economic, cultural, social and political implications.

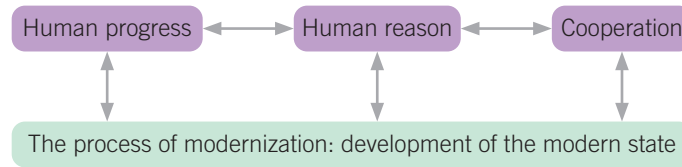
**Cipolla (1977: 7–8)**

**FIGURE 4.1** Classical liberalism

liberals agree that in the long run cooperation based on mutual interests can prevail. That is because modernization constantly increases the scope and the need for cooperation (Zacher and Matthew 1995: 119; Mahbubani 2013) (see Figure 4.1).

The belief in progress is a core liberal assumption. But it is also a point of debate among liberals (see Fawcett 2018; Pollard 1971: 9–13). What kind of progress? Scientific and technological for sure, but also social and political? What are the limits of progress? Are there any limits? Progress for whom? A small number of liberal countries or the entire world? The scope and degree of liberal optimism about progress have fluctuated over time. Many early liberals were inclined to be thoroughly optimistic; we have also noted the surge of utopian liberalism before and after the First World War. After the Second World War, however, liberal optimism became more muted. Robert Keohane, for example, cautiously notes that liberals believe 'in at least the possibility of cumulative progress' (Keohane 1989: 174; see also Keohane 2012). There was another surge of liberal optimism after the end of the Cold War, propelled by the notion of 'the end of history' based on the defeat of communism and the expected universal victory of liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1989, 1992). However, the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington of 11 September 2001, followed by attacks in Madrid, London, and elsewhere, have once more weakened liberal optimism. Many observers agree that at the present time, liberal ideas about progress and cooperation face a number of serious challenges (Niblett 2017; Duncombe and Dunne 2018; Lind and Wohlforth 2019; Mearsheimer 2019).

Progress for liberals is always progress for individuals. The core concern of liberalism is the happiness and contentment of individual human beings. John Locke argued that states existed to underwrite the liberty and property of their citizens and thus enable them to live their lives and pursue their happiness without undue interference from other people. Where realists see the state first and foremost as a concentration of power, a *Machtstaat*, liberals see the state as a constitutional entity, a *Rechtsstaat* which establishes and enforces the rule of law that respects the rights of citizens. Such constitutional states would also respect each other and would deal with each other in accordance with norms of mutual toleration. That argument was expanded by Jeremy Bentham—an eighteenth-century English philosopher—who coined the term 'international law' (indeed, Bentham was the first to coin the term 'international') (Suganami 1978). He believed that it was in the rational interests of constitutional states to adhere to international law in their foreign policies (Rosenblum 1978: 101). This argument was

**FIGURE 4.2** Basic liberal assumptions

further developed by Immanuel Kant, an eighteenth-century German philosopher. He thought that a world of such constitutional and mutually respectful states—he called them ‘republics’—could eventually establish ‘perpetual peace’ in the world (Gallie 1978: 8–36). Figure 4.1 summarizes the focus of these leading classical liberal thinkers.

In summary, liberal thinking is closely connected with the emergence of the modern constitutional state. Liberals argue that modernization brings progress in most areas of life. The process of modernization enlarges the scope for cooperation across international boundaries. Progress means a better life for at least the majority of individuals. Humans possess reason, and when they apply it to international affairs, greater cooperation will be the end result (see Figure 4.2). Formulated less boldly, liberals hold that anarchy in international affairs does not preclude cooperation, if common interests exist.

In Chapter 2, we presented the utopian or idealist liberalism of the 1920s. This chapter focuses on liberal theory after the Second World War. It is useful to divide post-war liberalism into four main strands of thinking: **sociological liberalism**; **interdependence liberalism**; **institutional liberalism**; and **republican liberalism** (Ikenberry 2020; Nye 1988; Keohane 2002; Zacher and Matthew 1995: 121). Two of these perspectives—interdependence liberalism and institutional liberalism—operate on the systemic level (Waltz’s third image) whereas the other two—sociological liberalism and republican liberalism—operate on the level of the nation-state (Waltz’s second image). The following sections of this chapter will focus on what we see as the most important contributions representing each of these strands.

## 4.2 Sociological Liberalism

For realists, IR is the study of relations between the governments of sovereign states. Sociological liberalism rejects this view as too narrow and one-sided. IR is not only about interstate relations; it is also about transnational relations, i.e., relations between people, groups, and organizations belonging to different countries.

Transnational relations are considered by sociological liberals to be an increasingly important aspect of international relations. James Rosenau defines transnationalism as follows: ‘the processes whereby international relations conducted by governments have been supplemented by relations among private individuals, groups, and societies that can and do have important consequences for the course of events’ (1980: 1). In focusing on transnational relations, sociological liberals return to an old theme in liberal thinking: the notion that relations between people are more cooperative and more supportive of peace than are relations between national governments.

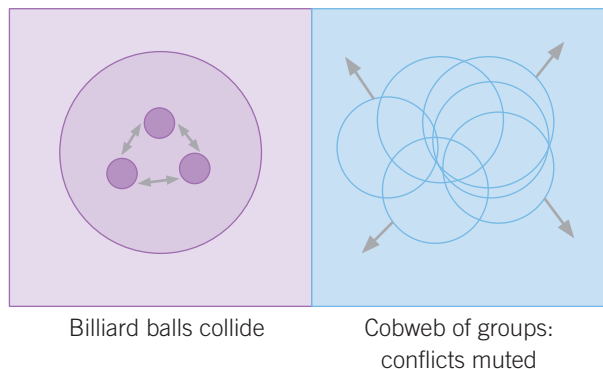


During the 1950s, Karl Deutsch was a leading figure in the study of transnational relations. He and his associates attempted to measure the extent of communication and transactions between societies. Deutsch argues that a high degree of transnational ties between societies leads to peaceful relations that amount to more than the mere absence of war (Deutsch et al. 1957). It leads to a security community: ‘a group of people which has become “integrated”’. Integration means that a ‘sense of community’ has been achieved; people have come to agree that their conflicts and problems can be resolved ‘without resort to large-scale physical force’ (Deutsch et al. 1957: 5). Such a security community has emerged, argues Deutsch, among the Western countries in the North Atlantic area. He lists a number of conditions that are conducive to the emergence of security communities: increased social communication; greater mobility of persons; stronger economic ties; and a wider range of mutual human transactions.

Many sociological liberals hold the idea that transnational relations between people from different countries help create new forms of human society which exist alongside or even in competition with the nation-state. In a book called *World Society*, John Burton (1972) proposes a ‘cobweb model’ of transnational relationships. The purpose is to demonstrate how any nation-state consists of many different groups of people that have different types of external ties and different types of interest: religious groups, business groups, labour groups, and so on. In marked contrast, the realist model of the world often depicts the system of states as a set of billiard balls; i.e., as a number of independent, self-contained units (see Figure 4.3). According to sociological liberals such as Burton, if we map the patterns of communication and transactions between various groups, we get a more accurate picture of the world because it represents actual patterns of human behaviour rather than artificial boundaries of states.

Burton implies that the cobweb model points to a world driven more by mutually beneficial cooperation than by antagonistic conflict. In this way the cobweb model builds on an earlier liberal idea about the beneficial effects of cross-cutting or overlapping group memberships. Because individuals are members of many different groups, conflict will be muted if not eliminated; overlapping memberships minimize the risk of serious conflict between any two groups (Nicholls 1974: 22; Little 1996: 72).

**FIGURE 4.3** The billiard ball model and the cobweb model





**BOX 4.2 Key Arguments: The importance of individuals in global politics**

Citizens have become important variables . . . in global politics . . . [for] at least five reasons:

1. The erosion and dispersion of state and governmental power.
2. The advent of global television, the widening use of computers in the workplace, the growth of foreign travel and the mushrooming migrations of peoples, the spread of educational institutions . . . [have] enhanced the analytic skills of individuals.
3. The crowding onto the global agenda of new, interdependence issues (such as environmental pollution, currency crises, the drug trade, AIDS, and terrorism) has made more salient the processes whereby global dynamics affect the welfare and pocketbooks of individuals.
4. The revolution of information technologies has made it possible for citizens and politicians literally to 'see' the aggregation of micro actions into macro outcomes. People can now observe support gather momentum as street rallies, the pronouncements of officials, the responses of adversaries, the comments of protesters . . . and a variety of other events get portrayed and interpreted on television screens throughout the world.
5. This new-found capacity of citizens to 'see' their role in the dynamics of aggregation has profoundly altered . . . possibly even reduced, the extent to which organization and leadership are factors in the mobilization of publics . . . Leaders are increasingly becoming followers because individuals are becoming increasingly aware that their actions can have consequences.

**Rosenau (1992: 274–6)**

James Rosenau has further developed the sociological liberal approach to transnational relations (Rosenau 1990, 1992). He focuses on transnational relations at the macro-level of human populations in addition to those conducted at the micro-level by individuals (see Box 4.2). Rosenau argues that individual transactions have important implications and consequences for global affairs. First, individuals have greatly extended their activities owing to better education and access to electronic means of communication as well as foreign travel. Second, states' capacity for control and regulation is decreasing in an ever more complex world. The result is a world of better informed and more mobile individuals who are far less tied than before to 'their' states. Rosenau sees a profound transformation of the international system that is underway: the state-centric, anarchic system has not disappeared but a new 'multicentric world has emerged that is composed of diverse "sovereignty-free" collectivities which exist apart from and in competition with the state-centric world of "sovereignty-bound" actors' (Rosenau 1992: 282). Rosenau thus supports the liberal idea that an increasingly pluralist world, characterized by transnational networks of individuals and groups, will be more peaceful. In some respects it will be a more unstable world, because the old order built on state power has broken down; but only rarely will conflicts lead to the use of force, because the new cosmopolitan individuals who are members of many overlapping groups will not easily become enemies divided into antagonistic camps.

Moisés Naím (2013a; see also Solomon and Steele 2017) also stresses the diffusion of power towards the micro-level. His argument is that the conventional players in political, military, and corporate ‘macro-structures’ of power are increasingly being undermined and challenged by ‘micropowers’—‘insurgents, fringe political parties, innovative start-ups, hackers, loosely organized activists, upstart citizen media outlets, leaderless young people in city squares, and charismatic individuals who seem to have “come from nowhere” are shaking up the old order’ (2013b: 1). The rise of micropowers, Naím argues, is due to three ‘revolutions’. The ‘More revolution’ means that many more people are living longer and healthier lives and that makes them more difficult to ‘regiment and control’ (2013a: 58). The ‘Mobility revolution’ implies that people are able to move around a lot more than earlier: they cross borders, they communicate globally, and they easily switch loyalties. Finally, the ‘Mentality revolution’ concerns the aspiration of the rapidly growing middle classes around the world. They shake off traditional values, take nothing for granted, and they do not easily defer to authorities.

Another recent statement of sociological liberalism was made by Phil Cerny (2010; see also Cerny and Prichard 2017). He underlines the many ways in which the distinction between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ is being challenged, leading to a transformation of the state (see Box 4.3). Where these processes will eventually lead remains uncertain; Cerny outlines four different major scenarios, ranging from ‘rosy’ and cooperative towards ‘hegemonic’ and more conflict-prone.

We can summarize sociological liberalism as follows. IR is not only a study of relations between national governments; IR scholars also study relations between private individuals, groups, and societies. Overlapping interdependent relations between people are bound to be more cooperative than relations between states because state citizenship is exclusive and, according to sociological liberalism, state interests do not overlap and cross-cut. A world with a large number of transnational networks will thus be more peaceful.

### 4.3 Interdependence Liberalism

#### BOX 4.3 Key Arguments: Phil Cerny on state transformation

What we are seeing is not the disappearance of the state but the actual transformation of the state, its absorption into transnational webs of politics and power, and the reconstruction of the notion of ‘statehood’ itself along multilevel, multinodal lines. The key driving force in this transformation and reconstruction will be transnationally linked groups of political actors engaging in crosscutting competition and coalition-building behaviour, exploiting the growing institutional loopholes of global politics, constructing new power games, creating new networks, and changing people’s perceptions of how world politics works by changing the parameters and dynamics of who gets—and should get—what, when, and how.

**Cerny (2010: 22–3)**

Interdependence means mutual dependence: peoples and governments are affected by what happens elsewhere, by the actions of their counterparts in other countries. Thus, a higher level of transnational relations between countries means a higher level of interdependence. This also reflects the process of modernization, which usually increases the level of interdependence between states. The twentieth century, especially the period since 1950, has seen the rise of a large number of highly industrialized countries. Theorizing about interdependence clearly belongs in the liberal tradition, but due to its focus on how economic factors affect political relations, it can also be seen as part of 'international political economy' (IPE) perspectives (Cohen 2008; 2019). We shall therefore return to theories about interdependence in Chapter 6 and Chapter 10, which are about IPE.

Richard Rosecrance (1986, 1995, 1999) has analysed the effects of increased interdependence on the policies of states. Throughout history, states have sought power by means of military force and territorial expansion. However, for highly industrialized countries, economic development and foreign trade are more adequate and less costly means of achieving prominence and prosperity. That is because the costs of using force have increased and the benefits have declined. Why is force less beneficial for states and trade increasingly so? The principal reason, according to Rosecrance, is the changing character and basis of economic production, which is linked to modernization. In an earlier age, the possession of territory and ample natural resources were the key to greatness. In today's world that is no longer the case; now a highly qualified labour force, access to information, and financial capital are the keys to success.

The most economically successful countries of the post-war period are 'trading states' such as Japan, Germany, and South Korea. They have refrained from the traditional military-political option of high military expenditure and economic self-sufficiency; instead, they have chosen the trading option of an intensified international division of labour and increased interdependence. Many small countries are also 'trading states'. For a long time the very large countries, most notably the former Soviet Union and the United States, pursued the traditional military-political option, thereby burdening themselves with high levels of military expenditure. According to Rosecrance, the end of the Cold War has made that traditional option less urgent and thus less attractive. Consequently, the trading-state option is increasingly preferred even by very large states. For instance, China has adopted a strategy of economic openness from the late 1970s.

Basically, these liberals argue that a high division of labour in the international economy increases interdependence between states, and that discourages and reduces violent conflict between states. One is here reminded of the dictum attributed to the French nineteenth-century economist Frédéric Bastiat: 'When goods don't cross borders, the soldiers will.' There still remains a risk that modern states will slide back to the military option and once again enter into arms races and violent confrontations. But that is not a likely prospect. It is in the less developed countries that war now occurs, according to Rosecrance, because at lower levels of economic development land continues to be the dominant factor of production, and modernization and interdependence are far weaker.

During the Second World War, David Mitrany (1966) set forth a **functionalist theory of integration**, arguing that greater interdependence in the form of transnational ties

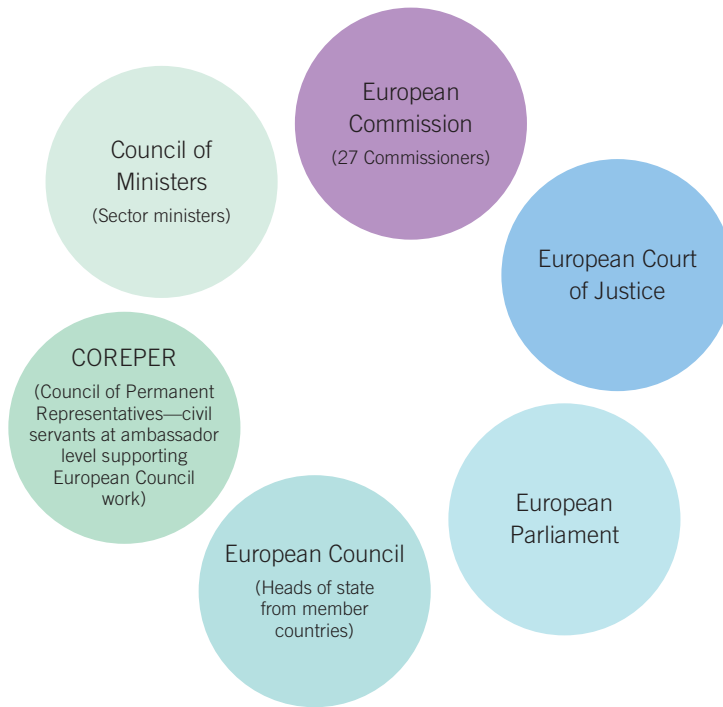
between countries could lead to peace. Mitrany imagined, perhaps somewhat naïvely, that cooperation would be arranged by technical experts, not by politicians. The experts would devise solutions to common problems in various functional areas: transport, communication, finance, and so on. Technical and economic collaboration would expand when the participants discovered the mutual benefits that could be obtained from it. When citizens saw the welfare improvements that resulted from efficient collaboration in international organizations, they would transfer their loyalty from the state to international organizations. In that way, economic interdependence would lead to political integration and to peace.

Ernst Haas developed a so-called neofunctionalist theory of international integration that was inspired by the intensifying cooperation that began in the 1950s between the countries of Western Europe. Haas builds on Mitrany, but rejects the notion that ‘technical’ matters can be separated from politics. Integration has to do with getting self-interested political elites to intensify their cooperation. Integration is a process whereby ‘political actors are persuaded to shift their loyalties . . . toward a new center whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the preexisting national states’ (Haas 1958: 16). This ‘functional’ process of integration depends on the notion of ‘spillover’, when increased cooperation in one area leads to increased cooperation in other areas. Spillover would ensure that political elites marched inexorably towards the promotion of integration. Haas saw that happening in the initial years of West European cooperation in the 1950s and early 1960s.

This is an example of a strong liberal theory which argues that institutions can change the identities and interests of states and thereby transform the international system (Beach and Pedersen 2020: 128–30)—or, in this case, the hitherto war-prone European multistate system. From the mid-1960s, however, West European cooperation entered a long phase of stagnation and even backsliding. That was due primarily to President de Gaulle of France, who opposed the limitations on French sovereignty that resulted from interdependence. Functional and neofunctional theory did not allow for the possibility of setbacks in cooperation; integration theorists had to rethink their theories accordingly. Haas concluded that regional integration should be seen in a larger context: ‘theory of regional integration ought to be subordinated to a general theory of interdependence’ (Haas 1976: 179) (see Figure 4.4).

It was indeed such a general theory of interdependence that was attempted in the next phase in liberal thinking. But we should also note that theories of integration have seen a revival since the 1990s due to a new momentum in West European cooperation (Hix 2005; Telò 2007; Wiener, Börzel, and Risse 2019). A core issue in these recent studies concerns whether integration is best explained by a liberal, neofunctionalist approach, or by a realist approach emphasizing national interest. The recent phase of Brexit and the ‘America First’ policy of Donald Trump have intensified that debate. We return to this discussion between liberals and realists in the section ‘Neorealist Critiques of Liberalism’.

An ambitious attempt to set forth a general theory of what they called ‘complex interdependence’ was made in the late 1970s in a book by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, Jr, *Power and Interdependence* (1977, 2001). They claimed both Deutsch and Haas as inspiration and argued that post-war ‘complex interdependence’ is qualitatively different from earlier and simpler kinds of interdependence. First, relations between states

**FIGURE 4.4** Major EU institutions

nowadays are not only or even primarily relations between stateleaders; there are relations on many different levels via many different actors and branches of government. Second, there is a host of transnational relations between individuals and groups outside of the state. Furthermore, military force is a less useful instrument of policy under conditions of complex interdependence.

Consequently, international relations are becoming more like domestic politics: ‘Different issues generate different coalitions, both within governments and across them, and involve different degrees of conflict. Politics does not stop at the water’s edge’ (Keohane and Nye 1977: 25). In most of these conflicts military force is irrelevant. Therefore, power resources other than military ones are of increasing importance, for example, negotiating skills. Finally, under complex interdependence states become more preoccupied with the ‘low politics’ of welfare and less concerned with the ‘high politics’ of national security (Keohane and Nye 1977: 24–6; Nye 1993: 169). The differences between the receding old realist world and the advancing new world of complex interdependence are summarized in Table 4.1 (see also Oatley 2019).

Complex interdependence clearly implies a far more friendly and cooperative relationship between states owing to ‘increasing fragmentation and diffusion of power in economic affairs, stemming from the growing interconnectedness of national economies’ (Cohen 2008: 28). According to Keohane and Nye (1977: 29–38), several consequences follow. First, states will pursue different goals simultaneously and transnational actors, such as NGOs and transnational corporations, will pursue their own separate goals free from state

**TABLE 4.1** Types of international relations

<b>REALISM</b>	<b>COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• States dominant actors and coherent units</li> <li>• Force usable and effective</li> <li>• Military security dominates the agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transnational actors increasingly important. States not coherent units</li> <li>• Military force less useful. Economic and institutional instruments more useful</li> <li>• Military security less important. Welfare issues increasingly important</li> </ul>

Based on Keohane and Nye (1977)

control. Second, power resources will most often be specific to issue areas. For example, in spite of their comparatively small size, Denmark and Norway will command influence in international shipping because of their large merchant and tanker fleets, but that influence does not easily translate to other issue areas. Third, the importance of international organizations will increase. They are arenas for political actions by weak states, they animate coalition formation, and they oversee the setting of international agendas.

Where do we locate complex interdependence in time and space? In terms of timing, it appears to be connected with social modernization or what Keohane and Nye (1977: 227) call ‘the long-term development of the welfare state’, which picked up speed after 1950. In space, complex interdependence is most evident in Western Europe, North America, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand: in short, the industrialized, pluralist countries (Keohane and Nye 1977: 27). The relevance of complex interdependence grows as modernization unfolds, and it therefore best characterizes the relations between advanced Western countries. Keohane and Nye are nevertheless at pains to emphasize that realism is not irrelevant or obsolete:

It is not impossible to imagine dramatic conflict or revolutionary change in which the use of threat of military force over an economic issue or among advanced industrial countries might become plausible. Then realist assumptions would again be a reliable guide to events.

(Keohane and Nye 1977: 28)

In other words, even among industrialized countries of the West an issue could still become ‘a matter of life and death’ (Keohane and Nye 1977: 29), because even that world is still in some basic respects a world of states. In that eventuality, realism would be the more relevant approach to events. Therefore, interdependence liberals suggest a compromise:

The appropriate response to the changes occurring in world politics today is not to discredit the traditional wisdom of realism and its concern for the military balance of power, but to realize its limitations and to supplement it with insights from the liberal approach.

(Nye 1990: 177)

Keohane and Nye thus construe ‘complex interdependence’ not as a direct description of reality but as an ideal type that could be contrasted with the realist ideal type. Sometimes, international relations will be more aligned with the interdependence pole; at other occasions, reality will fall closer to the realist pole (Keohane and Nye 2012: 265). Interdependence liberals are thus more balanced in their approach than some other liberals for whom everything has changed for the better and the old world of violent conflict, unbridled state power, and the overriding importance of the national interest is gone forever. However, in adopting this middle-of-the-road position, interdependence liberals face the problem of deciding exactly how much has changed, how much remains the same, and what the precise implications are for IR.

This criticism is particularly relevant for Keohane and Nye’s work on complex interdependence. While they originally introduced it because they believed that the realist description of international relations had become outdated, they were later at pains to emphasize the complementarity between their perspective and especially Waltz’s (1979) neorealism. As Keohane and Nye (2012: 277) put it in an afterword to the 1989 edition of their book, their aim was a ‘synthesis of neorealist and liberal theories’. However, following the end of the Cold War, their assertiveness again increased, and in 2012, they noted that ‘we are struck by how much the world has come to resemble the ideal type of complex interdependence that we hypothesized’ (Keohane and Nye 2012: xxxiv). We return to this debate about the extent and nature of change in the international system later in the chapter (for analyses of interdependence and conflict, see Einstein 2017; Mansfield and Pollins 2003).

Meanwhile, interdependence liberalism can be summarized as follows. Modernization increases the level and scope of interdependence between states. Under complex interdependence, transnational actors are increasingly important, military force is a less useful instrument, and welfare—not security—is becoming the primary goal and concern of states. That means a world of more cooperative international relations.

## 4.4 Institutional Liberalism

This strand of liberalism picks up on earlier liberal thought about the beneficial effects of international institutions. In Chapter 2, we noted Woodrow Wilson’s vision about transforming international relations through the building of international organizations, most importantly the League of Nations. Present-day liberal institutionalists are less optimistic than their more idealist predecessors. They agree that international institutions can make cooperation easier and far more likely, but they do not claim that institutions can by themselves guarantee a qualitative transformation of international relations. Powerful states will not easily be completely constrained. However, liberal institutionalists do not agree with the realist view that international institutions are mere ‘scraps of paper’. International institutions are more than mere handmaidens of strong states. They are of independent importance, and they can promote cooperation between states (Keohane 2012; Johnson and Heiss 2018; Wiener, Börzel, and Risse 2019).

What is an international institution? According to liberal institutionalists, it is either an international organization, such as NATO or the European Union (EU); or it is a set of rules which governs state action in particular areas, such as aviation or shipping. These sets of rules are also called ‘regimes’ (Keohane 1984; 1989). Often the two go together;

the trade regime, for example, is shaped primarily by the World Trade Organization (WTO). There may also be regimes without formal organizations; for example, the Law of the Sea conferences held under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) do not have a formal international organization. Institutions can have global membership, such as the UN, or they can be regional (or sub-regional), such as the EU. Finally, we should note that there is an additional type of international institution which is of a more fundamental kind, such as state sovereignty or the balance of power. These fundamental institutions are not what institutional liberals focus on; but they are main objects of study for International Society theorists, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

We can identify an important development in liberal thinking about institutions. In the 1970s and 1980s, the study of international organizations metamorphosed into the study of international regimes. That is, rather than focusing on concrete international organizations such as NATO or the WTO, the literature began to focus on the—more general—institutionalized rules of international cooperation. The core idea was that self-interested states create international regimes to solve collective action problems (Keohane 1984; 2012). If well crafted, regimes have the advantage of solving commitment problems and creating ‘repeated games’, that is, bargaining under the expectation that the parties will need to cooperate again in the future (Beach and Pedersen 2020: 91–3). This strand of thinking accepted the realist notion of the primacy of states and the primacy of power and interests but it held that regimes could ameliorate conflict between states even under anarchy—and that state leaders often recognize the advantages of this (Stein 2008: 204).

Liberal institutionalists claim that international organizations and international regimes help promote cooperation between states. The extent of institutionalization can be measured on two dimensions: scope and depth. ‘Scope’ concerns the number of issue areas in which there are institutions. Are they only in a few crucial economic areas, such as trade and investment, or are they in many other economic, as well as in military and socio-political, areas? For assessing the ‘depth’ of institutionalization, three measures have been suggested:

- **Commonality:** the degree to which expectations about appropriate behaviour and understanding about how to interpret action are shared by participants in the system.
- **Specificity:** the degree to which these expectations are clearly specified in the form of rules.
- **Autonomy:** the extent to which the institution can alter its own rules rather than depending on outside agents (i.e., states) to do so.

(From Keohane 1989: 4; see also Peters 2011)

It is clear that a thorough analysis of the scope and depth of institutionalization among a group of states is a substantial research task. The difficulty is to determine the exact level of institutionalization. One way of doing that is to look at a group of states where we immediately believe that the scope and depth of institutionalization are high and then evaluate the ways in which institutions matter. One such group of states is Europe, especially the European Union countries. EU countries cooperate so intensively that



they share some functions of government, for example, in agricultural and industrial policies; they have established the regulatory framework for a single market in the economic sector, and they are in the process of intensifying their cooperation in other areas. The EU, in other words, is a good test case for examining the importance of institutions. Institutional liberals claim that institutions have made a significant difference in Western Europe since the end of the Cold War (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2019). Institutions acted as ‘buffers’ which helped absorb the ‘shocks’ sent through Western Europe by the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany (Keohane et al. 1993).

The institutional liberal view can be set against that of neorealist analysis. Neorealists argue that the end of the Cold War is likely to bring the return of instability to Western Europe which could lead to a major war. We have reason to fear a repeat of the turbulence of the first half of the twentieth century. Peace in Europe during the Cold War rested on two pillars that made up the balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union. They were, first, bipolarity with its stable distribution of military power and, second, large arsenals of nuclear weapons almost entirely monopolized by those superpowers (Waltz 1993: 44). With the revival of multipolarity, however, instability and insecurity are sharply increased. At the root of all this is the anarchic structure of the international system. According to neorealist John Mearsheimer, ‘[a]narchy has two principal consequences. First, there is little room for trust among states . . . Second, each state must guarantee its own survival since no other actor will provide its security’ (1993: 148).

The argument made by liberal institutionalists (Keohane 2012; Keohane et al. 1993) is that a high level of institutionalization significantly reduces the destabilizing effects of multipolar anarchy identified by Mearsheimer. Institutions make up for lack of trust between states. They do that by providing a flow of information between their member states, which consequently are much less in the dark about what other states are doing and why. Institutions thus help reduce member states’ fear of each other. In addition, they provide a forum for negotiation between states. For example, the European Union has a number of fora with extensive experience in negotiation and compromise, including the Council of Ministers, the European Commission, and the European Parliament. Institutions provide continuity and a sense of stability. They foster cooperation between states for their mutual advantage. Institutions help ‘create a climate in which expectations of stable peace develop’ (Nye and Welch 2020: 39). The constructive role of institutions as argued by institutional liberals is summarized in Box 4.4.

#### BOX 4.4 Key Concepts: Institutional liberalism: the role of institutions

- Provide a flow of information and opportunities to negotiate;
- Enhance the ability of governments to monitor others’ compliance and to implement their own commitments—hence their ability to make credible commitments in the first place;
- Strengthen prevailing expectations about the solidity of international agreements.

**Based on Keohane (1989: 2; see also Keohane 2012; Deudney and Ikenberry 2018)**

**BOX 4.5** Key Arguments: Transnational conflicts and international institutions

International institutions are overtaxed in a double sense: their basis of legitimacy is too small for the responsibilities they are supposed to carry out; but, in view of the magnitude of global problems, what they do is not enough. Many of the post-war international institutions have been supplemented with, or replaced by, new institutions that intervene more deeply into the affairs of national societies. These institutions increasingly exercise independent political authority and violate the principle of non-intervention, which, in turn, leads to serious problems of legitimacy and public acceptance. At the same time, international institutions are too weak, for example, to regulate international financial markets or to effectively combat climate change and its impacts. As a result, growing societal and national resistance to these institutions has begun to emerge in conjunction with transnational disputes over international affairs.

**Zürn (2011)**

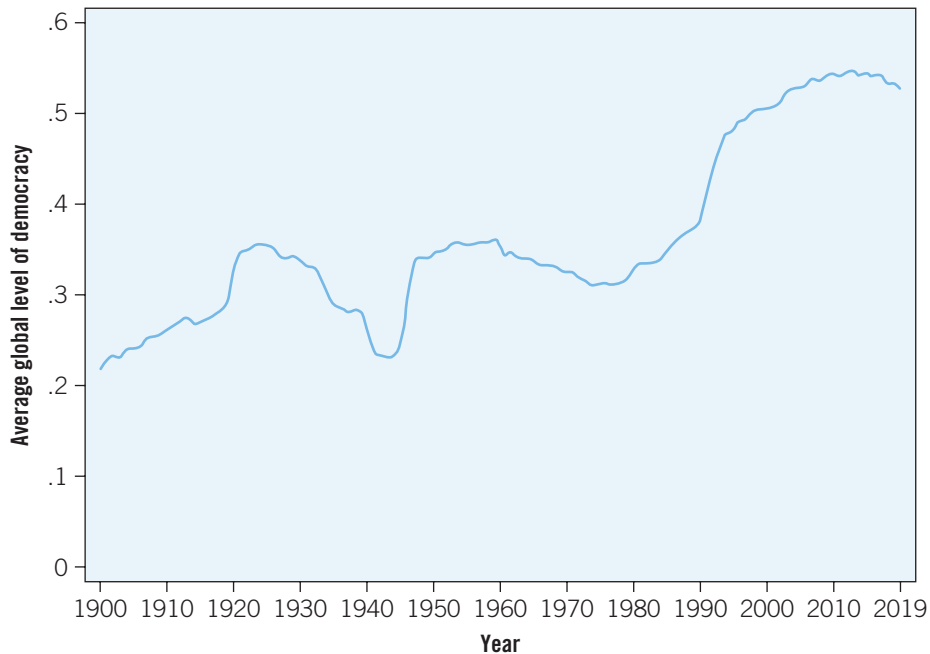
Current research on international institutions focuses on the challenges that these institutions face in an increasingly globalized world. On the one hand, there is a growing need for the regulation and management that institutions provide; on the other hand, they are lacking in both power and legitimacy necessary to take on heavy responsibilities (see Box 4.5).

In this context, focus is also on the factors that decide the demand for institutional cooperation and integration. One major position in this debate emphasizes the crucial role of state interests; that position is labelled 'liberal intergovernmentalism' (Moravcsik 1999). Another major position is neofunctional theory which focuses on international cooperation driven by functional challenges; that is, some tasks are better attended to by international cooperation than by states alone and that works in favour of more cooperation. A recent version of neofunctionalism attempts to create a revised analytical framework that makes room for both 'intergovernmental' and 'functional' elements (Niemann 2006). At the same time, there is now more focus on issues connected with leadership (Beach 2010; Paterson et al. 2010) and with democracy and legitimacy (Eriksen 2009). This focus on agency and democratic legitimacy has seemingly been vindicated by recent events. Maybe the greatest current threat to international institutions came from an elected president within the leading liberal power. The Trump presidency in the United States had no enthusiasm for international institutions and would rather pursue its 'America First' agenda in bilateral deals with other states (Ikenberry 2017). Institutional liberalism can be summarized as follows. International institutions help promote cooperation between states and thereby help alleviate the lack of trust between states and states' fear of each other, which are considered to be the traditional problems associated with international anarchy. The positive role of international institutions for advancing cooperation between states continues to be questioned by realists. We return to that debate later.

## 4.5 Republican Liberalism

Republican liberalism is built on the claim that liberal democracies are more peaceful and law-abiding than other political systems. The argument is not that democracies never go to war; democracies have gone to war as often as have non-democracies (Weart 1998; Reiter and Stam 2002). But the argument is that democracies do not fight each other. This observation was first articulated by Immanuel Kant (1992 [1795]) in the late eighteenth century in reference to republican states rather than democracies, and it was later put forward by the American philosopher Thomas Paine (Waltz 1959: 101). It was resurrected by Dean Babst in 1964 and it has been advanced in numerous studies since then. One liberal scholar even claims that the assertion that democracies do not fight each other is ‘one of the strongest nontrivial or non-tautological statements that can be made about international relations’ (Russett 1989: 245). This finding is the basis of the present optimism among many liberal scholars and policy-makers concerning the prospects of long-term world peace. Their reasoning goes as follows: Because the number of democracies in the world has increased rapidly in recent generations (see Figure 4.5), we can look forward to a more peaceful world with international relations characterized by cooperation instead of conflict (parts of this section draw on Sørensen 2008a). As Bruce Russett (2003: 493–4) succinctly puts it, ‘the more democracies there are in

**FIGURE 4.5** Democracy’s progress



Note: The graph reports average global scores for the Varieties of Democracy Electoral Democracy Index, V-Dem Dataset v11.1 (CC BY SA), available at: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/>. The index ranges from 0.0 (no electoral democracy) to 1.0 (perfect electoral democracy).

the world, the fewer potential adversaries we and other democracies will have and the wider the zone of peace will be’.

Why are democracies at peace with one another? The most systematic theoretical answer to that question has been given by Michael Doyle (1983, 1986). Doyle based his argument on Immanuel Kant’s classical liberal treatment of the subject. There are three elements behind the claim that democracy leads to peace with other democracies. The first is the existence of domestic political cultures based on peaceful conflict resolution. Democracy encourages peaceful international relations because democratic governments are controlled by their citizens, who will not advocate or support wars with other democracies.

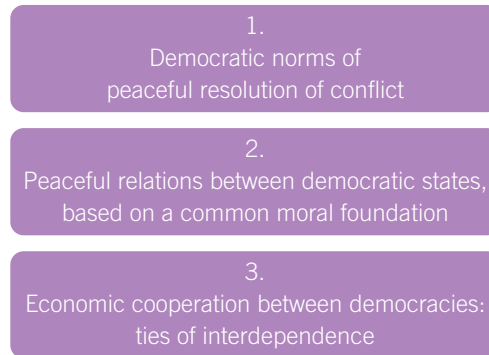
The second element is that democracies hold common moral values which lead to the formation of what Kant called a ‘pacific union’. The union is not a formal peace treaty; rather, it is a zone of peace based on the common moral foundations of all democracies. Peaceful ways of solving domestic conflict are seen as morally superior to violent behaviour, and this attitude is transferred to international relations between democracies. Freedom of expression and free communication promote mutual understanding internationally, and help to assure that political representatives act in accordance with citizens’ views.

Finally, peace between democracies is strengthened through economic cooperation and interdependence. In the pacific union it is possible to encourage what Kant called ‘the spirit of commerce’: mutual and reciprocal gain for those involved in international economic cooperation and exchange. Recent work has added civil society as an additional democratic inducer of peace. In a global analysis covering the period 1900–2010, Hegre, Bernhard, and Teorell (2020) show that the combination of social accountability, created by a vibrant civil society, and vertical accountability in the form of electoral competition is the most effective way of securing peace between democracies.

Of the different strands of liberalism considered in this chapter, republican liberalism is the one with the boldest expectations for a transformation of the international system. For most republican liberals, there is not only confidence but also hope that world politics is already developing and will develop far beyond rivalry, conflict, and war between independent states. Republican liberals are optimistic that peace and cooperation will eventually prevail in international relations, based on progress towards a more democratic world. Not only that, they see it as their responsibility to promote democracy worldwide, for in so doing they are promoting peace, which is one of the most fundamental of all political values (Weart 1998).

The end of the Cold War helped launch a new wave of democratization; that led to growing liberal optimism as regards the future of democracy. Yet, most liberals are well aware of the fragility of democratic progress. When republican liberals examine the conditions for democratic peace in the light of recent democratic transformations in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa, the evidence does not support any profound optimism. With regard to the first condition (see Figure 4.6), it is evident that a democratic culture with norms of peaceful conflict resolution has not yet taken root in many new democracies. Democratic norms must be ingrained before the domestic basis of the democratic peace will be secure, and such a development of the political culture usually takes a long time. There will be setbacks; some countries will revert to non-democratic

**FIGURE 4.6** Republican liberalism: three conditions of peace among liberal democracies



forms of rule. For example, Russia's democracy scores have consistently declined in the 2000s, and today, it is clearly autocratic (see Table 4.2).

Furthermore, many scholars have warned that established democracies are not doing too well either. In some of the classical homes of liberal democracy, a clear majority of people are dissatisfied with the way democracy is working. In the UK (69 per cent), in the US (59 per cent), in France (58 per cent), and in Greece (74 per cent) are expressing dissatisfaction (Pew Research Center 2020). A recent analysis goes so far as to frame this as a new process of 'de-consolidation' of western democracies (Foa and Mounk 2016; see also Jervis et al. 2018). However, several scholars have cast doubt on these negative interpretations, showing that the established democracies have proven remarkably stable even in recent years (Alexander and Welzel 2017; Carothers and Young 2017; Norris 2017). On this basis, it seems fair to say that the general distinction between new and fledgling democracies and old and established still exists (Cornell et al. 2020).

As regards the second condition, peaceful relations have indeed developed between the consolidated democracies of the West. There is reason to hope that most of the new democracies of Eastern Europe will come to be included in this zone—provided that there are no severe setbacks in their further democratization. Recent developments in Hungary and Poland, where populist politicians have undermined independent institutions such as courts and media, raise concerns but most of the new EU members still fare well on indicators of democracy. The democracies of the Global South are more problematic in that regard. The foundations between the Global North and South are not strong. During the Cold War, the United States was hostile and even aggressive towards some southern democracies; e.g., the Dominican Republic in the early 1960s and Chile in the early 1970s. This reflected American determination to defend its perceived economic and security interests in its competition with the Soviet Union (for further analysis, see Sørensen 2008a: 131–59). Today, there can still be divisions and mistrust between old and new democracies.

Turning to the final condition, economic cooperation and interdependence are highly developed among the consolidated democracies of the West. Most of the new democracies

TABLE 4.2 Most and least democratic states in the world

The Varieties of Democracy Electoral Democracy Index (data from 2019)		
Highest rating (top 10th percentile)		
Denmark	Spain	Portugal
Estonia	Sweden	Canada
Costa Rica	Norway	Ireland
Belgium	Switzerland	Greece
Luxembourg	New Zealand	Italy
France	Finland	United Kingdom
High rating (top 25th percentile—top 10th percentile)		
South Korea	Argentina	United States of America
Cyprus	Latvia	Slovenia
Australia	Taiwan	Czech Republic
Germany	Jamaica	Peru
the Netherlands	Austria	Panama
Barbados	Armenia	Chile
Japan	Lithuania	Malta
Mauritius	Cape Verde	Timor-Leste
Slovakia		
Lowest rating (bottom 10th percentile)		
Saudi Arabia	Bahrain	Turkmenistan
Eritrea	Laos	Somalia
China	Yemen	Burundi
Qatar	Palestine/Gaza	Tajikistan
North Korea	Syria	Thailand
United Arab Emirates	Eswatini	
Low rating (bottom 25th percentile—bottom 10th percentile)		
Turkey	Belarus	Iran
Morocco	Libya	Vietnam
Zimbabwe	Republic of the Congo	Sudan
Palestine/West Bank	Russia	Uzbekistan
Bangladesh	Nicaragua	Azerbaijan
Jordan	Zanzibar	Cuba
Chad	Cambodia	Egypt
Rwanda	Kazakhstan	Oman
Djibouti	Venezuela	

Based on data from <https://www.v-dem.net/en/> (CC BY SA). The index measures electoral competition for the electorate's approval under circumstances when suffrage is extensive; organizations can operate freely; elections are clean; and elections affect the composition of the chief executive of the country. In between elections, there is freedom of expression and an independent media capable of presenting alternative views on political matters. The index ranges from 0 (no electoral democracy) to 1 (perfect electoral democracy).

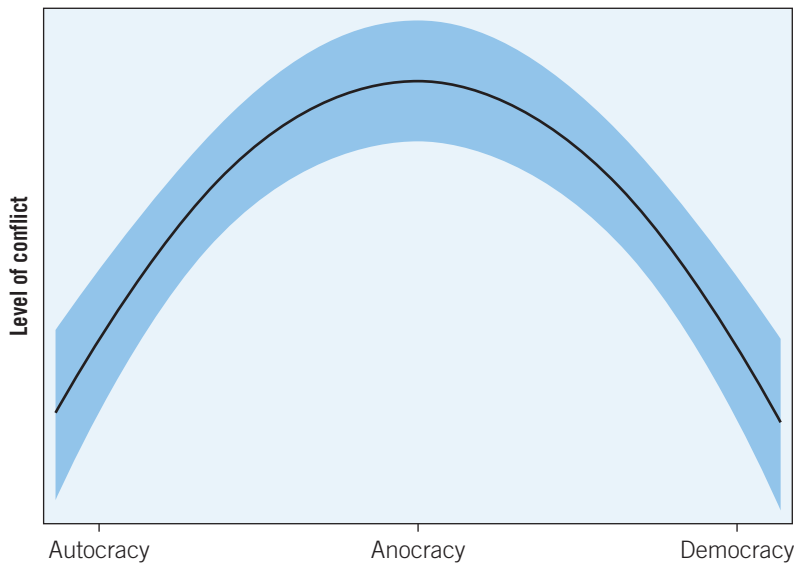
of Eastern Europe are integrated into these economic networks through membership of the European Union. Yet, the complex negotiations about the Eastern enlargements of the EU in 2004, 2007, and 2013 demonstrate the considerable difficulties involved in close economic cooperation between countries at highly different levels of development. For the democracies of the South, continued one-sided economic dependence on the North rather than interdependence is the order of the day, even two decades after the end of the Cold War. That relation of basic inequality augurs less well for the development of peaceful relations even if both parties have democratic governments.

In short, the emergence of a global pacific union embracing all the new and old democracies is not guaranteed. Indeed, most of the new democracies fail to meet at least two of the three conditions for a democratic peace identified above. And instead of exhibiting further progress, they may backslide towards authoritarian rule (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Most republican liberals are therefore less optimistic than was Francis Fukuyama when he predicted ‘the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government’ (1989: 4). Liberals argue that there is a democratic ‘zone of peace’ among the consolidated liberal democracies, including Western Europe, North America, and Japan. But the expansion of that zone is far from assured (Russett 1993: 138). At the same time, established democracies are facing a rising tide of ‘populism, economic inequality, frustration and fear’ (Hobson 2017: 706). Even if there is so far little evidence that this is producing democratic deconsolidation, the consequences for the democratic peace remain uncertain.

Most republican liberals thus emphasize that democratic peace is a dynamic process rather than a fixed condition. A pacific union does not spring into existence between countries as soon as they meet a minimum definition of democracy. Peace is built on all three foundation stones (see Figure 4.6) only over a long period of time. There can be setbacks. There can even be reversions to non-democratic rule.

There is a weakness even in this qualified republican liberal argument, however. Republican liberals need to specify the exact ways in which democracy leads to peace, and they need to sort out in more precise terms when there is a democratic peace between a group of democracies and why. In that context a more thorough evaluation of the current processes of democratization is necessary. There are already a number of contributions that address these issues (Harrison 2010; Hook 2010; Hobson 2011; 2017; Hegre 2014; Bartusevicius and Skaaning 2018; Hegre, Bernhard, and Teorell 2020).

At the same time, many scholars have argued that there is a ‘dark side’ to the relationship between democracy and peace (Mann 2005; see also Richmond 2020). A large body of scholarship has thus associated both democratization and partial democracy with an increased risk of external warfare and/or civil war (Mansfield and Snyder 1995; 2005; 2012; Hegre et al. 2001; see Gleditsch and Hegre 2014). One strand within this literature argues that changes in the direction of democracy are likely to increase hitherto suppressed conflicts between societal groups, including ethnic groups. This has been used to predict both higher levels of civil war in democratizing states and a higher involvement in external warfare. The latter argument—which is indebted to Samuel P. Huntington’s (1968) seminal work on political order—is that the combination of popular

**FIGURE 4.7** A stylized version of the reverse U-curve

mobilization and weak institutions in democratizing states tempts elites to play the nationalist card, e.g., by getting involved in conflicts abroad (Mansfield and Snyder 1995; 2005). Another strand has identified a curvilinear relationship where both full-blown autocracies and genuine democracies are relatively internally peaceful but where partial democracies, or what is sometimes referred to as ‘intermediate regimes’ or ‘anocracies’, are particularly conflict-prone (Hegre et al. 2001; but see Bartusevicius and Skaaning 2018). This is because these regimes allow popular grievances to be aired but lack the ability—which genuine democracies have—to effectively address them (Gleditsch and Hegre 2014). This ‘reverse U-curve’, as it has been called due to its shape, is illustrated in Figure 4.7.

These claims have attracted much criticism. For example, it has been objected that it is really political instability rather than partial democracy or democratization per se that spurs conflict, and the data used as evidence of e.g., the curvilinear relationship have also been questioned (Vreeland 2008). However, it seems fair to say that whereas genuine democracies (see Table 4.2) have a long track record of being internally peaceful and having cordial relations with other democracies, the same has not been the case for fledgling democracies or states moving along the obstacle-strewn path towards democracy. This has also been argued to be the case historically. In a qualitative analysis of the democratic peace theory, Weart (1998) finds no conclusive evidence that ‘established’ democracies ever went to war against each other: from classical Greece, via the Swiss ‘forest’ republics, and the Italian urban republic of the Middle Ages up to the present day. But he also shows how this historical iron law did not always apply to new and fledgling democracies. This does not as such contradict republican liberalism but it shows that the zone of the democratic peace might be more limited than many liberals believe. Whether some of the new challenges that threaten both established and fledgling democracies will change this remains to be seen.



Republican liberalism can be summarized as follows. Democracies do not go to war against each other owing to their domestic culture of peaceful conflict resolution, their common moral values, and their mutually beneficial ties of economic cooperation and interdependence. These are the foundation stones upon which their peaceful relations are based. For these reasons, a world of consolidated liberal democracies is expected to be a peaceful world.

Realists are sceptical about this version of liberalism too. Behind their disbelief is a larger debate which sets liberalism against realism in IR. The core question in that debate is: can a liberal world escape the perils of anarchy? Will a more liberal world, with more democracies, with a higher level of interdependence, and with more international institutions, mean that anarchy is eclipsed? Will it mean that war is permanently ended? The next two sections take up the most important debates between liberals and neorealists.

## 4.6 Neorealist Critiques of Liberalism

We saw in Chapter 2 that the first major debate in IR was between idealist liberalism and pessimist realism. The debate between liberalism and realism continues to this day. This debate has created divisions in the liberal camp. There is now a group of 'weak liberals' who have moved closer to the realist camp; and there is a group of 'strong liberals' who continue to support a more distinctively liberal view of world politics.

A main point of contention in previous debates between liberals and realists around the time of the Second World War concerned 'human nature'. We have seen that liberals generally take a positive view of human nature, whereas realists tend to hold a negative view: they see human beings as capable of evil. This issue was at the core of Hans Morgenthau's realist critique of liberals. The substance of this critique can be expressed as follows: 'You have misunderstood politics because you have misestimated human nature' (Waltz 1959: 40).

These diverging views of human nature continue to separate realists from liberals. But 'human nature' is no longer a major point of debate for two reasons. First, it was increasingly realized among neorealists as well as liberals that human nature is highly complex. It is behind 'good' things as well as 'bad' things: peace and war, philanthropy and robbery, tolerance and prejudice (see Chapter 3). Our attention must therefore shift to the social and political context to help us explain when humans (having the potential for being good as well as bad) will behave in one way or another way (Waltz 1959: 16–41). Second, there was the influence from the behavioural movement in political science. That influence led scholars away from the study of human actions and their 'internal' moral qualities and capabilities towards the analysis of observable facts and measurable data in the 'external' world; i.e., overt evidence of patterns of human behaviour. How should scholars conceive of the external world? How should we view history?

We noted earlier that classical realists have a non-progressive view of history. States remain states in spite of historical change. They continue to reside in an unchanging anarchical system. Anarchy leads to self-help: states have to look after themselves; nobody will do it for them. To be secure, they arm themselves against potential enemies; one state's

security is another state's insecurity. The result can be an arms race and, eventually, war. That was the case 2,500 years ago where Greek city-states, whether or not democracies, often went into battle against each other (Bradford 2001: 81–94). According to neorealists, it is still the case today, because the basic structure of the state system remains the same. History is 'the same damn things over and over again' (Layne 1994: 10).

For liberals, however, history is at least potentially progressive. We identified the main conditions of liberal progress earlier and summarized them in the four major strands of liberal thought. Neorealists are not impressed. They note that such 'liberal' conditions have existed for a long time without being able to prevent violent conflict between states. For example, economic interdependence is nothing new. As a percentage of world gross national product (GNP), world exports in 1970 were below the 1880–1910 level (see Table 4.3). Put differently, the rapid increase in world trade between 1950 and 1975 which liberals view as the great era of interdependence was nothing more than a recovery from abnormally low levels of interdependence caused by two world wars and the Great Depression in the first half of the twentieth century.

Financial flows reveal a similar story. Measured as a percentage of GNP, total foreign investment from Western developed countries was much higher over the entire period

**TABLE 4.3** Trade as percentage of world GNP, various years

YEAR	WORLD EXPORTS/ WORLD GNP
1830	4.6
1840	5.7
1850	6.8
1860	9.3
1870	9.8
1880	11.4
1890	11.1
1900	10.4
1910	10.4
1913	11.4
1950	8.1
1960	9.2
1970	10.0
1980	16.9
2002	21.8
2010	26.2
2018	30.1

Based on tables in Thompson and Krasner (1989: 199, 201) and [www.OECD.org](http://www.OECD.org)

from 1814 to 1938 than during the 1960s and 1970s. International banking has been important for more than two centuries (Thompson and Krasner 1989). In sum, economic interdependence is nothing new, and in the past it has done little to prevent wars between states, such as the First World War and the Second World War (Gilpin 2001: 3).

Neorealists are also critical of the role that liberals attach to international institutions. While states cooperate through institutions, they still do it solely on the basis of their own decision and self-interest. The strong prevail in international relations. Institutions are not important in their own right, they simply reflect the power and interests of states (Mearsheimer 1995b: 340). And if institutions sometimes exert an independent effect on international relations, then this is likely to be in areas of 'low politics', not the 'high politics' that realism centres on (Stein 2008: 206). Finally, as we indicated, neorealists are critical of republican liberalism (Gowa 1999). They emphasize that there is always the possibility that a liberal or democratic state will revert to authoritarianism or another form of non-democracy. Furthermore, today's friend might very well turn out to be tomorrow's enemy, whether or not they are a democracy (Walt 1985).

There is thus a common thread running through the realist critique of the various strands of liberalism: the persistence and permanence of anarchy and the insecurity that that involves. According to neorealists, anarchy cannot be eclipsed. Anarchy means that even liberal states must contemplate the possibility that their liberal friends will perhaps some day turn against them. 'Lamentably, it is not possible for even liberal democracies to transcend anarchy' (Mearsheimer 1993: 123). No amount of sociological, interdependence, institutional, or republican liberalism can do the trick. And, as long as anarchy subsists, there is no escape from self-help and the security dilemma. Liberal optimism is not warranted.

#### 4.6.1 The Retreat to Weak Liberalism

Liberals have reacted to these neorealist objections in two different ways. One group is somewhat defensive, accepting several realist claims including the essential point about the persistence of anarchy. We shall call this group '**weak liberals**'. Another group, whom we shall call the '**strong liberals**', will not budge; they claim that the world is changing in some fundamental ways which are in line with liberal expectations.

The work of Robert Keohane, one of the leading scholars in the debate between liberals and neorealists, illustrates how some liberals have adjusted to realist critiques. His early work with Joseph Nye (Keohane and Nye 1971) is characteristic of sociological liberalism. In that work, they draw an important distinction between a 'state-centric' paradigm and a 'world politics' paradigm; the former's focus is on 'interstate interactions' whereas the latter's focus is on 'transnational interactions' in which non-governmental actors play a significant role (Keohane and Nye 1971: xii, 380). The implication is that world politics is changing dramatically from a state system to a transnational political system. That argument is an example of strong liberalism.

This sociological liberal view was popular in the early 1960s; realists were on the defensive. But sociological liberalism appeared to be a prisoner of history and the circumstances of the time. It looked as if the flutter of transnational relations upon

which sociological liberals built their argument could only develop smoothly within a framework created by dominant American power (Gilpin 1975; 1987; Little 1996: 78; Mearsheimer 2019). That was true for a period following the Second World War. Then came a period when American power appeared to wane; the country was tied up in a difficult and unpopular war in Vietnam. There was also trouble on the economic front: President Nixon terminated the dollar's convertibility into gold in 1971 (see Chapter 10). The United States' political and economic distress sent shock waves through the entire international system. That put realism back on the offensive; if sociological liberalism only worked within a realist framework of power, progress had hardly gone very far.

Keohane turned his attention away from transnational relations and back towards states. The first result was the theory of complex interdependence described earlier. This analysis was a movement in the direction of realism: the primary importance of states was acknowledged. But it was unclear to what extent realism should be supplemented with liberal insights. Keohane increasingly focused his analysis on international institutions, contributing to what we have termed liberal institutionalism. That brought him one step closer to neorealism. The analytical starting point is now clearly realist. States are the major actors, the international system is anarchical, and the power of states is highly significant. Still, as we saw above, a liberal core remained, namely the idea that international institutions can facilitate cooperation.

Even though this brand of liberalism is fairly close to a neorealist position, most such realists remained dissatisfied with the revised and very much weakened liberal thesis. They claim that Keohane as well as several other liberal institutionalists overlook one crucial item, that of relative gains. 'Gains' are benefits that accrue to participants that cooperate (see Figure 4.8). Institutional liberals claim that institutions facilitate cooperation and thus make it less likely that states will cheat on each other. That is because international institutions are transparent. They provide information to all member states and they thus foster an environment in which it is easier for states to

**FIGURE 4.8** Absolute and relative gains

**Absolute gains** As long as we do well it doesn't matter if others do even better.

*Example:* The United States economy grows by 25% over the next decade; China grows by 75%.

**Relative gains** We will do our best, but number one priority is that the others don't get ahead of us.

*Example:* The United States economy grows by 10% over the next decade; China grows by 10.3%.

The American who chooses the latter scenario over the first is concerned with relative gains.

make reliable commitments. Neorealists reply that cheating is not the main problem in negotiation between states. The main problem is relative gains. States must worry that other states gain more from cooperation than they do themselves. Neorealists claim that institutional liberals take no account of that problem; they 'ignore the matter of relative gains . . . in doing so, they fail to identify a major source of state inhibitions about international cooperation' (Grieco 1993: 118).

This neorealist critique led Keohane to emphasize a qualification which further moderated his liberal position. That qualification concerned the conditions for cooperation between states. The single most important condition is the existence of common interests between states (Keohane 1993: 277). If states have interests in common, they will not worry about relative gains. In such situations, institutions can help advance cooperation. In the absence of common interests, states will be competitive, apprehensive, and even fearful. In those circumstances, institutions will not be of much help.

This way of responding to the neorealist critique does make the liberal position less vulnerable to realist attacks, and it does help us to understand why there can be cooperation under anarchy. But it leads liberalism closer and closer to neorealism: less and less remains of a distinctive and genuine liberal theory. Wæver (1996) characterizes this rapprochement as the 'neo-neo-synthesis' (of *neorealism* and *neoliberalism*) but also makes clear that the realists have set the conditions of this theoretical coming together. In other words, liberal institutionalism is open to the criticism that it is merely neorealism 'by another name' (Mearsheimer 1995a: 85). Keohane has recognized the close familiarity between institutional theory and neorealism (Keohane 2002). However, the end of the Cold War and the rapid growth of globalization gave a strong boost to a more pronounced liberal posture.

#### 4.6.2 The Counter-attack of Strong Liberalism

The neorealist attack on liberal theory looks strong. Their spare and parsimonious theory builds on two basic assumptions: history is 'the same damn things over and over again' and international anarchy leads to insecurity and the risk of war. A terse and bold starting point makes for strong statements. But parsimony can also be a weakness, because so many things are not taken into consideration. Can we really seriously believe that nothing has changed in international relations over the past several hundred years? Neorealism, as one experienced observer noticed, 'manages to leave most of the substance of the field [of IR] outside the straitjacket' (Hoffmann 1990). In order to argue for such a bald thesis, you have to close your eyes to a lot of things.

That is where '**strong liberals**' begin their counter-attack on neorealism. They maintain that qualitative change has taken place. Today's economic interdependence ties countries much closer together; economies are globalized (see Figure 4.3 and Box 4.6); production and consumption take place in a worldwide marketplace. It would be extremely costly in welfare terms for countries to opt out of that system (Holm and Sørensen 1995; Cerny 2010; Ikenberry 2018). Today, there is also a group of consolidated liberal democracies for whom reversion to authoritarianism is next to unthinkable, because all major groups in society support democracy. These countries conduct their

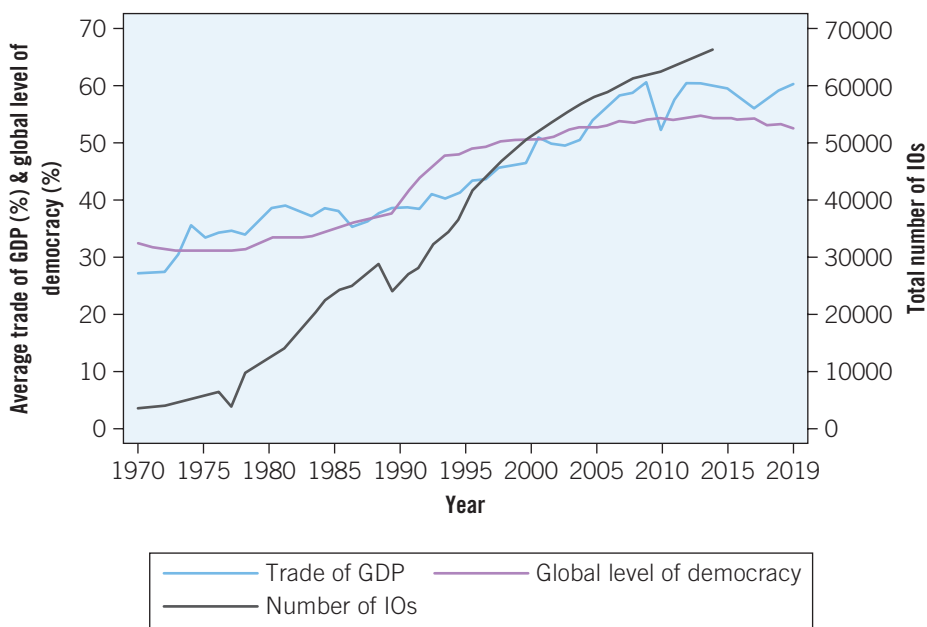
### BOX 4.6 Key Developments: Globalization in practice

Gigantic flows of capital mediated by digital technology have stimulated trade in goods and services. Extending their reach around the world, markets have migrated to cyberspace and created new linkages among national and regional economies. Huge transnational corporations, powerful international economic institutions, and gigantic regional trading systems like Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) or the European Union (EU) have emerged as the major building blocks of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's global economic order.

**Steger (2017: 37)**

mutual international relations in new and more cooperative ways. For them there is no going back; historical change is irreversible. Finally, the number of international institutions have increased by leaps and bounds, and they help states avoid dangerous miscalculations (see Figure 4.9). ‘Strong liberals’ include Rosenau (2003), Slaughter (2004), Ikenberry (2009, 2018), and Cerny (2010).

**FIGURE 4.9** Global rise of democracy levels, trade, and international institutions, 1970–2019



Data on trade from The World Bank: World Development Indicators (CC BY 4.0); data on democracy from V-Dem Dataset v11.1 (CC BY SA); data on international Organizations from <https://uia.org/publications/statistics>, retrieved October 30, 2020 © Union of International Associations 1997–present.

Neorealists do not insist that there has been no change at all; but they maintain that such change has not led to the disappearance of anarchy. The self-help system of states remains in place. In that fundamental respect, the realist analysis continues to apply. From this fact, neorealists draw the conclusion that there is a huge difference between domestic and international politics. In domestic affairs there is 'authority, administration and law', while international politics 'is the realm of power, struggle, and of accommodation' (Waltz 1979: 113). Strong liberals, however, dispute that crucial premise: the assertion that anarchy—as understood by realists—remains in place. Strong liberals do not argue that anarchy has been replaced by hierarchy; that a world government has been created or is in the making. Rather, they argue that anarchy is a far more complex international relationship than is recognized by neorealists, and they question the conclusions that neorealists draw from the existence of anarchy.

What does it mean that there is anarchy in the international system? It means that there is no single, overarching government. It does not mean that there is no government at all. It follows that the distinction between domestic and international politics is not as clear as neorealists claim. The fact is that some states lack an effective and legitimate system of government; e.g., Cameroon, Chad, Zimbabwe, Libya, and Somalia. The fact also is that some groups of states are acquiring a governmental system; e.g., the EU. Politics is not 'stopping at the water's edge'. Anarchy does not necessarily mean complete absence of legitimate and effective authority in international politics.

Strong liberals take their cue from that reality. International politics need not be a 'raw anarchy' with fear and insecurity all around. There can be significant elements of legitimate and effective international authority. And strong liberals see examples in the international relations of firmly consolidated, liberal democracies, because here we have combined the key elements of sociological liberalism, interdependence liberalism, institutional liberalism, and republican liberalism. One way of characterizing these relations is by Karl Deutsch's term, 'security communities'. The consolidated liberal democracies of Western Europe, North America, and Japan constitute a security community (Singer and Wildavsky 1993; Adler and Barnett 1998). It is extremely unlikely—indeed, it is well-nigh unthinkable—that there will be violent conflict between any of these countries in the future.

Strong liberals thus underline the need for a more nuanced view of peace and war. Peace is not merely the absence of war, as most realists believe. There are different kinds or degrees of peace. The 'warm peace' between the countries of the security community of liberal democracies is far more secure than the 'cold peace' between, say, the United States and the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War (Boulding 1979; Adler and Barnett 1996). A more nuanced view of war is also required. War has changed dramatically in the course of history. War has grown more and more destructive, spurred by technological and industrial development, culminating in the two world wars of the twentieth century. In addition, there is now the risk of unlimited destruction through nuclear war. Strong liberals argue that these developments increase the incentives for states to cooperate (Mueller 1990, 1995); neorealists do not deny that nuclear weapons help decrease the risk of war (Waltz 1993). But strong liberals go one step further. They argue that large-scale war has

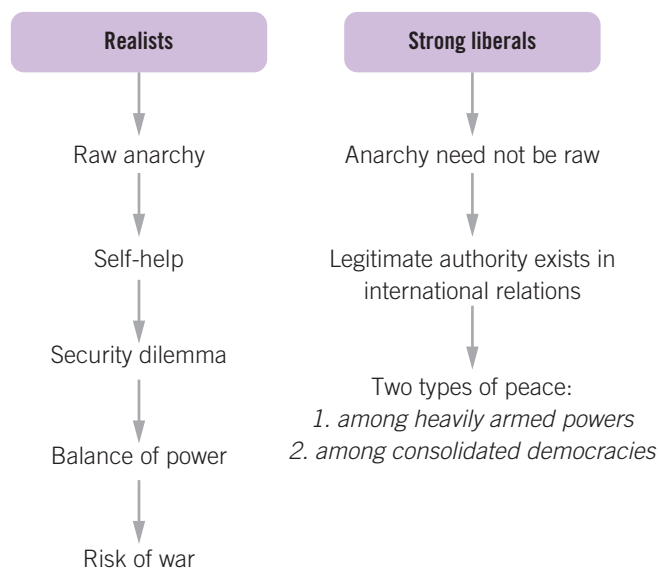
moved ‘toward terminal disrepute because of its perceived repulsiveness and futility’ (Mueller 1990: 5; 2009).

Strong liberals, then, argue that in important parts of the world anarchy does not produce the insecurity that realists claim. Peace is fairly secure in many important places. There are two main types of peace in the world today. The first type is among the heavily armed powers, especially the nuclear powers, where total war threatens self-destruction. It rests primarily (but not solely) on the balance created by military power. It is the least secure peace. The second main type of peace is among the consolidated democracies of the OECD. This is a far more secure, ‘liberal’ peace, predicated upon liberal democratic values, a high level of economic interdependence, and a dense network of institutions facilitating cooperation (Lipson 2003; Mandelbaum 2004).

For these reasons, strong liberals remain optimistic about the future. They argue that genuine progress is possible, and that it is taking place in important parts of the world. There is no world government, of course, but in several areas the world has moved far beyond the neorealist condition of raw anarchy, with all its negative consequences for international relations. Liberals thus appear better equipped than most realists when it comes to the study of secular change. Whereas many realists always see more of the same in international relations, namely anarchy and power politics, most liberals have a notion of modernization and progress built into their theories which makes them more receptive to the study of social, economic, institutional, and political change (see Figure 4.10).

However, liberals are not as precise in their claims as are realists. How much has actually changed? How secure is a democratic peace? What is the exact link between the various liberal elements in international relations—such as democracy or transnational relations—and more peaceful and cooperative relations between governments?

**FIGURE 4.10** Prospects for war and peace





Liberals have problems answering these questions. That is because liberals try to theorize historical change, which is by its very nature complex, fluid, open-ended, and thus uncertain in the course it will take.

## 4.7 Realist Resurgence?

There can be no doubt that liberal optimism has been under pressure in recent years. Twenty-five years ago, when the Berlin Wall came down and the Cold War ended, there was a profound optimism about the global triumph of liberal democracy. In 2007, a mere eleven years later, *Time Magazine* celebrated Vladimir Putin as ‘Person of the Year’; a man with ‘steely confidence and strength’, he had allegedly moved Russia away from the ‘rudderless mess’ that prevailed under Boris Yeltsin toward order, stability, and economic prosperity (Sørensen 2011: 167).

Then came the financial crisis in 2008, the rise of populism and nationalism in established democracies (Diamond 2019), the long and seemingly endless wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other fragile states, the rapid economic rise of China and the resurgence of Russia’s international influence. Liberal values, practices, and institutions are on the defensive; the profound optimism of the 1990s is a thing of the past, and the present is dominated by economic setbacks, frail and wilting democracies that cannot consolidate, ineffective and only partly legitimate international institutions in need of serious overhaul, new security threats, and a flagging support for liberal values.

Even if all this comes after a long phase of liberal progress since the mid-twentieth century, with many more democratic countries, a dense network of international institutions, a global commitment to the capitalist market economy (see Figure 4.9), and the lack of serious contenders to liberal principles, the challenges to a liberal order are clear.

Realists find themselves vindicated. A liberal international order ‘can arise only in unipolar systems where the leading state is a liberal democracy’, says realist John Mearsheimer (2019: 7). With the rise of China, the unipolar moment is over, and so is any chance of maintaining a liberal international order ‘for the foreseeable future’ (Mearsheimer 2019: 43). Furthermore, the liberal order was accompanied by a profound optimism that led to liberal overreach, even hubris, in pushing for a liberal order with global reach. The consequences were a populist backlash, which includes the election of Donald Trump and the process of Brexit (Mearsheimer 2018; Rosenberg and Boyle 2019).

Many liberals agree that the liberal order is under pressure (Zielonka 2018; Duncombe and Dunne 2018; Lind and Wohlforth 2019; Colgan and Keohane 2017; Daalder and Lindsay 2018; Nye 2017). But they continue to be more optimistic about its prospects. First, liberals dispute the claim that the decline of American hegemony and the rise of China mean the end of liberal world order. China (and many other countries) benefitted from that order; indeed, it has been the context for the rapid rise of China. Therefore, ‘the liberal international characteristics of order—openness, rules, multi-lateral cooperation—are deeply rooted and likely to persist’ (Ikenberry 2018: 18; for a more sceptical view, see Jahn 2018; Musgrave 2019). Second, the liberal order is flexible;

it can be developed and shaped in new ways in order to adapt to new circumstances. The rising states may resent Western dominance, but they have long supported the wider set of rules and principles of order. Nor does China, or other rising states, present any coherent, alternative vision of world order. In relation to liberal world order, they are stakeholders seeking influence, not revolutionaries looking to overturn it.

It is important to note that behind these debates among realists and liberals, there is also a significant amount of consensus: they agree about the need, and prospect, for some kind of international order in a deeply globalized and interdependent world. Gone is the shouting competition of the immediate post-Cold War days between realists who foresaw new, deep rivalries, even wars, among the great powers, and liberals who embraced a vision of ever profounder companionship among states in a world of liberal democracies. The current disagreement is more soft and modest: what kind of order will emerge, how extensive and to which extent will it be based on liberal principles? We return to that discussion in Chapter 12.

## 4.8 Integrating International and Domestic Factors

Liberal international theory almost by definition integrates domestic-level factors into theories of international relations. The core idea of liberalism is that there is a close connection between domestic political processes and the foreign policy of states in the international system (Jørgensen 2010: 58). The best example is probably the theory about the democratic peace, associated with what we have called republication liberalism where peace among democracies is based on domestic institutions and values.

At the same time, many key works by liberals have emphasized that their theorizing takes place primarily or solely on the systemic level. This is the case for both liberal theories about interdependence and about international institutions. Prominent examples include Zürn (2018), Keohane and Nye (1977; 2012) and Keohane (1984; 2012). How can we make sense of this apparent contradiction? Moravcsik (2008: 248) argues that liberal theory is able to take both domestic and international factors into consideration. Each element does part of the explanatory heavy lifting: that is, while domestic preferences determine the foreign policy goals of states, these goals have to be attained within the constraints imposed by the preferences of the other states; that is, by the structure of the state system.

In this way, liberal international theory arguably has a high potential when it comes to combining different levels of analysis. It is done in different ways by weak and strong liberals, respectively. Weak liberals emphasize systemic pressures and mostly see international institutions and economic interdependence as ameliorating factors that can create international cooperation. Strong liberals take a more benign view of how domestic developments can transform identities and hence preferences to the extent that the structure of the international system is transformed (Beach and Pedersen 2020: 112–31). But both camps clearly attempt to combine and unravel the outside-inside threads.

Liberal theorists therefore claim that they can make sense of variations in states' foreign policies and explain why the international system differs in different historical

periods, say, during and after the Cold War (Moravcsik 2008: 247). Moreover, it seems fair to say that the nexus between domestic and international factors is at the forefront of the present liberal research agenda (Jahn 2018). But it is also fair to say that we are still waiting for a liberal theory that can precisely explain the complex relationship between domestic and international forces (Beach and Pedersen 2020: 245–6).

### \* Key points

- The theoretical point of departure for liberalism is the individual. Individuals plus various collectivities of individuals are the focus of analysis; first and foremost states, but also corporations, organizations, and associations of all kinds. Liberals maintain that not only conflict but also cooperation can shape international affairs.
- Liberals are basically optimistic: when humans employ their reason they can arrive at mutually beneficial cooperation. They can put an end to war. Liberal optimism is closely connected with the rise of the modern state. Modernization means progress in most areas of human life, including international relations.
- Liberal arguments for more cooperative international relations are divided into four different strands: sociological liberalism, interdependence liberalism, institutional liberalism, and republican liberalism.
- Sociological liberalism: IR not only studies relations between governments; it also studies relations between private individuals, groups, and societies. Relations between people are more cooperative than relations between governments. A world with a large number of transnational networks will be more peaceful.
- Interdependence liberalism: modernization increases the level of interdependence between states. Transnational actors are increasingly important, military force is a less useful instrument, and welfare, not security, is the dominant goal of states. That 'complex interdependence' signifies a world of more cooperative international relations.
- Institutional liberalism: international institutions promote cooperation between states. Institutions alleviate problems concerning lack of trust between states and they reduce states' fear of each other.
- Republican liberalism: democracies do not go to war against each other. That is due to their domestic culture of peaceful conflict resolution, to their common moral values, and to their mutually beneficial ties of economic cooperation and interdependence.
- Neorealists are critical of the liberal view. They argue that anarchy cannot be eclipsed and therefore that liberal optimism is not warranted. As long as anarchy prevails, there is no escape from self-help and the security dilemma.

- Liberals react differently to these neorealist objections. One group of ‘weak liberals’ accepts several neorealist claims. Another group, ‘strong liberals’, maintains that the world is changing in fundamental ways that are in line with liberal expectations. Anarchy does not have the exclusively negative consequences that neorealists claim: there can be positive anarchy that involves secure peace between consolidated liberal democracies.

## ? Questions

- Liberals are optimistic about human progress, cooperation, and peace. What are the reasons given for that optimism? Are they good reasons?
- Has international history been as progressive as liberals claim? Use examples.
- Identify the arguments given by the four strands of liberalism discussed in this chapter. Is any strand of liberalism more fundamentally important, or are all strands equally important?
- Some liberal theories only operate at the level of the international system; others emphasize the domestic level. What are the pros and cons of each of these strategies for understanding international relations?
- What arguments can you make, for and against, the assertion that democracy has made striking progress in the world during the past decades?
- What—according to some researchers—is the dark side of democratization?
- Realists argue that anarchy cannot be transcended. Strong liberals say it can. Who is right and for which reasons?
- Think of one or two research projects based on liberal theory.
- Liberal optimism has come under fire in recent decades. Why is that?
- To what extent have we seen a rapprochement between liberal and realist views of the prospects for world order in an increasingly globalized world?

## 📖 Guide to further reading

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## CHAPTER 5

# International Society

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### Summary

The International Society tradition of IR—sometimes labelled the ‘English School’ (Jones 1981; Buzan 2014)—is an approach to world politics that focuses on international history, ideas, structures, institutions, and values. The basic assumptions and claims are: (1) at the heart of the subject are people and basic values such as independence, security, order, and justice; (2) IR scholars are called upon to interpret the thoughts and actions of the people involved with international relations; (3) international anarchy is an important concept but not an exclusive premise—International Society scholars argue that world politics is not merely an international system, it is an **‘anarchical society’** with distinctive rules, norms, and institutions that statespeople are involved with in their conduct of foreign policy; (4) states are not autonomous entities in themselves, like machines, instead, they are human organizations—statespeople wield the power of states and are responsible for their policies and actions; (5) International Society incorporates notions of both a pluralist society of multiple sovereign states, and a solidarist world society of the human population on the planet. The chapter reviews how history has entered into the International Society tradition and ends with some reflections on how International Society scholars have combined international and domestic factors in their explanatory frameworks.

## 5.1 Basic International Society Approach

The International Society tradition has deep historical roots, but it was recognized as a distinct approach to IR only in the 1980s and 1990s (see Box 5.1). According to a leading exponent of this approach (Wight 1991: 1), international politics ‘is a realm of human experience’ with its own distinctive characteristics, problems, and language. To study IR means ‘entering this tradition’, ‘joining in the conversation’, and reflecting on that experience with the aim of understanding it in proper academic terms. The main substantive point of this approach is that international relations—at least in some historical periods, including recent centuries—can be understood as a ‘society’ of mutually recognizing states and not merely as a ‘system’ of competing and conflicting powers (see Box 5.3). It is distinctive from other societies by having **sovereign states** as its primary, although not exclusive, membership.

Hedley Bull (1969: 20) summarized the ‘traditional’ or ‘classical’ International Society approach as follows: it derives from ‘philosophy, history and law’ and it ‘is characterized above all by explicit reliance upon the exercise of judgement’ (see Box 5.2). By ‘the

### BOX 5.1 Key Thinkers: A short history of the International Society approach

The International Society approach draws on the work of political theorists such as Hugo Grotius and Emer de Vattel and the historian Arnold Heeren. It owes much to London School of Economics (LSE) Professor Charles Manning’s interwar work on international society. Its main institutional home has been the so-called British Committee on the Theory of International Politics, which was formed in 1958 and which aimed to bring academics from fields such as History, Philosophy, Theology, and International Relations together with practitioners, mainly diplomats. The committee can be seen as the first generation of International Society scholars. It was chaired, in succession, by the historians Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, the diplomat Adam Watson, and the IR scholar Hedley Bull. It was dissolved in the 1980s, at about the time the International Society approach began to be recognized as a separate school within IR. It got the name ‘the English School’ from a critic (Jones 1981) who emphasized its intellectual attachment to London and the LSE. By the late 1990s, it had emerged as an alternative approach to IR on a par with realism and liberalism. A second generation of scholars includes John Vincent, Nicholas Wheeler, Tim Dunne, Andrew Linklater, Andrew Hurrell, Hidemi Suganami, Robert Jackson, and Barry Buzan. A third generation includes Cornelia Navari, Ian Hall, Edward Keene, William Bain, Tonny Brems Knudsen, Laust Schouenborg, and several others. This more recent scholarship has been influenced by very different perspectives, including neorealism, critical theory, and social constructivism, thereby reinforcing the traditional image of the International Society approach as a ‘broad church’ or a ‘great conversation’ (see Linklater and Suganami 2006: Ch. 1; Buzan 2014: Ch. 1; see also Friedner Parrat, Spandler, and Yao 2020).

### BOX 5.2 Key Arguments: Classical International Society approach

- Interpretive
- Normative
- Historical-concrete

exercise of judgement', Bull meant that IR scholars should fully understand that foreign policy sometimes presents difficult moral choices to the statespeople involved: choices between rival political values and goals; choices that may involve the use of armed force and may therefore bring about physical destruction and human suffering for the people caught up in it. A difficult foreign-policy choice in this regard would be the decision to go to war or the decision to engage in humanitarian intervention. Examples of such decisions are discussed later in this chapter.

The traditional International Society approach seeks to avoid the stark choice between (1) state egotism and conflict; and (2) human goodwill and cooperation presented by the debate between realism and liberalism. On the one hand, International Society scholars reject classical realists' pessimistic view of states as self-sufficient and self-regarding political organizations that relate to each other and deal with each other only on an instrumental basis of narrow self-interest—international relations conceived as an unchanging state 'system' that is prone to recurrent discord, conflict, and—sooner or later—war. Against the realist notion of the *raison d'état* they put what Adam Watson (1992: 14) terms the *raison de système*, that is, the 'belief that it pays to make the system work'. On the other hand, international society scholars reject liberalism's optimistic view of international relations as a developing world community that is inevitably moving in the direction of unparalleled human progress and perpetual peace, a condition which would be increasingly indistinguishable from domestic peace and prosperity. Compared with liberalism, the International Society approach is more state-centric, more observant of history and tragedy, and it puts much more emphasis on the 'fundamental' institutions of international society including sovereignty, diplomacy, international law, great power management, the balance of power and war.

The International Society tradition is thus a middle way (*via media*) in classical IR scholarship; it occupies a position between realism and liberalism and develops that into a separate and distinctive IR approach. It regards international relations as a **society of states** in which the principal actors are statespeople who are specialized in the practice of statecraft. The realm of international relations is thus a 'formally anarchical but substantively orderly social environment' (Linklater and Suganami 2006: 47). 'International organizations', 'non-governmental organizations', 'multinational corporations', and so forth are important human organizations that are also involved in international relations. But they are subordinate to sovereign states, which International Society theorists consider to be the foundation of world politics.

International politics is understood to be the special branch of politics that is lacking in supreme authority—i.e., there is no world 'government' that is above sovereign



**BOX 5.3** Key Concepts: International system, international society

A system of states (or international system) is formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another's decisions to make the behaviour of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other. A society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another and share in the working of common institutions.

**Bull (1995: 9–13)**

states. To that extent, International Society scholars agree with classical realists. However, International Society scholars disavow what has been termed the 'domestic analogy', that is, the idea that in the absence of government there can be no order (Bull 1977: 46–9; Linklater and Suganami 2006: 45–6). The international sphere differs from the national but there are still common interests, rules, institutions, and organizations that are created and shared by states and which help to shape the relations of states. That international social condition is summed up by Hedley Bull's (1995) phrase 'the anarchical society': a worldwide social order of independent states. More particularly, Bull drew an important distinction between an **international system** and an **international society** (see Box 5.3).

International societies have existed in several historical state systems, including the ancient Greek system of city-states and ancient China in the Warring States Period (Bull 1977: 15–16; Watson 1992: 50; see Chapter 1). But the purest specimen of an international society is the one that grew out of the common culture of Latin Christendom and came into its own in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Watson 1992). This European society came to engulf the entire globe following the decolonization in the twentieth century (Jackson 2000; Buzan and Lawson 2015). The more international relations constitute a *society* and the less international relations merely compose a *system* is an indication of the extent to which world politics forms a distinctive human civilization with its own norms, rules, institutions, and values. As Wight (1977: 33) observes, a certain degree of cultural unity among states seems to be a prerequisite for such orderly relations. For example, during the most tense periods of the Cold War, the international society between the United States and the Soviet Union was reduced to being not much more than a system in which the foreign policy of each side was based on its calculation about the intentions and capabilities of the other side, particularly as regards nuclear weapons. According to Wight, decolonization in the decades after the Second World War also weakened the common culture that European international society rested on (Hall 2014). After the Cold War, however, the norms and values of international society have been widely respected and have provided a *modus operandi* for Western-centred international organizations such as the G-7 (Group of Seven—the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Italy, and Canada); the Organization of Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD); the International Monetary Fund (IMF); the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD); the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In spite of such fluctuations over time, international society scholars hold that there is a more general element of international order based on the shared participation in fundamental rules and institutions such as the mutual recognition of sovereignty and diplomatic conventions.

Another important set of distinctions are the concepts of **realism**, **rationalism**, and **revolutionism** (Wight 1991). To International Society theorists, these are three different ways of looking at the relations of states. The first concept views states as power agencies that pursue their own interests. It thus conceives of international relations solely as instrumental relations devoid of morality or law. That is the realist view of Machiavelli and Hobbes. The second concept views states as legal organizations that operate in accordance with international law and diplomatic practice. It thus conceives of international relations as rule-governed activities based on the mutually recognized authority of sovereign states. That is the rationalist view of Grotius. The third concept downplays the importance of states and places the emphasis on human beings. Humans are seen to compose a primordial 'world community' or 'community of humankind' that is more fundamental than the society of states. This is the revolutionist view of Kant.

According to Martin Wight (1991), IR cannot be adequately understood through any one of these conceptualizations alone. IR can only be adequately understood through all of them together. If properly carried out, the International Society approach should be an exploration of the conversation or dialogue between these three different theoretical perspectives. Realists, rationalists, and revolutionists each represent a distinctive normative position, or 'voice', in a continuing dialogue about the conduct of foreign policy and other international human activities. That will be set out in the next section.

All three voices broadcast the fact that international relations are basically human activities concerned with fundamental values. Two of the most fundamental are given special attention by Hedley Bull (1995): **international order** and **international justice**. By 'international order', Bull means 'a pattern or disposition of international activity that sustains' the basic goals of the society of states. By 'international justice' he means the moral rules which 'confer rights and duties upon states and nations', such as the right of self-determination, the right of non-intervention, and the right of all sovereign states to be treated on a basis of equality (Bull 1995: 78). These two basic values of the International Society tradition will be discussed in a later section.

Two international values that are closely related to the order versus justice distinction are given special emphasis by John Vincent (1986): state sovereignty and human rights. On the one hand, states are supposed to respect each other's independence; that is the value of state sovereignty and non-intervention. On the other hand, international relations involve not only states but also human beings who possess human rights regardless of the state of which they happen to be a citizen. There can be and sometimes is a conflict between the right of non-intervention and human rights. When that happens, which of these values should take priority? If human rights are being massively violated from within a state, does the government retain its right of state sovereignty or is

humanitarian intervention justified? This is one of the basic value conflicts of international relations that became prominent after the Cold War.

The traditional International Society approach presents two main answers to these questions. The first answer is *pluralism*, which stresses the importance of state sovereignty and coexistence. According to this view, rights and duties in the international society are conferred upon sovereign states; individuals have only the rights given to them by their own states or recognized by the society of states. Therefore, the principles of respect for sovereignty and non-intervention always come first. The second answer given by the International Society approach to the above questions is *solidarism*, which stresses the common purpose of states, hence the notion of solidarity. Emphasis is placed on the importance of individuals as the ultimate members of international society. Human rights may take precedence over the rights of sovereign states, just as human beings existed long before sovereign states were thought of. On this view, there is at least a right and probably also a duty for states to conduct armed intervention if that is deemed necessary to mitigate extreme cases of human suffering inside a country.

The exact understanding of pluralism and solidarism has evolved over time. According to Hedley Bull (1977), who formulated these two perspectives, the pluralist view prevailed in the nineteenth century whereas the solidarist view has been more influential in the twentieth century (Linklater and Suganami 2006: 59–60; Buzan 2014: 15).

In summary, the traditional International Society approach views world politics as a human world. That means that it is attuned to the normative aspects and value dilemmas of international relations; that also means that the approach is basically situational or historical. World politics is open to all the potential that human beings have for improving their lives, including the progress and peace that classical liberals emphasize. But world politics is exposed, as well, to all the shortcomings and limitations that human beings exhibit, with all the possibilities of risk, uncertainty, danger, conflict, and so on that that implies; including the insecurity and disorder emphasized by classical realists. The International Society approach refuses to choose between liberal optimism and realist pessimism (see Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1 Basic International Society approach	
Core concepts	Human beings Solidarism State sovereignty Pluralism International structure System of states Society of states
Basic values	Order Justice

The main strength of the International Society approach for studying international relations is its comprehensiveness, and arguably also its subtlety, which results from its being open and receptive to the strong points of other approaches, particularly realism and liberalism. It is also receptive to the basic elements of international law and the major events and episodes of international history. Finally, it is not wedded to particular methods of analysis. This methodological and theoretical ‘pluralism’ has been singled out as the essence of the International Society approach (Linklater and Suganami 2006: 31, 84; Buzan 2014: 23). That openness enables it to receive input from developments in various other theoretical traditions, including neorealism, constructivism, and critical theory (see Box 5.1).

For instance, some contemporary ‘English School’ theorists have moved away from the traditional approach of Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, who emphasized the role of ideas, norms, and values in IR, and closer to the social science approach to IR exemplified by the work of Kenneth Waltz, which emphasizes international structure (see Chapter 3). Barry Buzan (2004) seeks to develop a more sophisticated analysis of the structure of international society. By ‘structure’, we refer to the encompassing framework and underlying foundation of international relations, the very basis of the existence of either an international system or an international society. For Waltz, international structure governs power relations of sovereign states. For Buzan, international structure is sustained by a number of ‘primary institutions’ of international society. The master institutions are: sovereignty; territoriality; diplomacy; great power management; equality of peoples; market; nationalism; and environmental stewardship (Buzan 2004: 187). According to Buzan (2014: 78), ‘any given international society can be defined in terms of the set of primary institutions that compose it’.

The idea behind primary institutions was found in Bull’s (1977: xiv) work, where he contrasts genuine ‘institutions’ of international society such as the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, great power management, and war with ‘pseudo-institutions’ such as the League of Nations and later the UN. Bull’s point is that the former set of institutions are the important ones in international relations. Bull thus went much further than Butterfield and Wight by attempting to systematically develop a theory of international society, based on an understanding of how primary institutions are constituted and how they operate. Bull sees the master institutions of international society as intersubjective. In his own words, institutions do ‘not necessarily imply an organization or administrative machinery, but rather a set of habits and practices shaped towards the realization of common goals’ (Bull 1977: 74). For instance, the manifestation of the balance of power, arguably the most important institution of international society, is that no state can lay down the law for others (Bull 1977: 101). Only an interpretative approach can appreciate the nature of these first-order institutions. This is different from pseudo-institutions, which are often formalized (e.g., the UN, G-7 or OSCE), and which can be directly observed. Buzan tries to further develop these ideas and to refine the conceptual distinction between the ‘primary institutions’ of international society and ‘pseudo-institutions’, which he calls ‘secondary institutions’ (Buzan 2014: 76–7; see also Friedner Parrat 2017). This distinction points towards an important difference vis-à-vis liberalism, which we return to below.

## 5.2 The Three Traditions

Martin Wight (1991) taught that the leading ideas of the most outstanding classical theorists of IR—theorists such as Machiavelli, Grotius, and Kant—fall into three basic categories: realist, rationalist, and revolutionist. **Realists** are those who emphasize and concentrate on the aspect of ‘international anarchy’; **rationalists** are those who emphasize and concentrate on the aspect of ‘international dialogue and intercourse’; and **revolutionists** are those who emphasize and concentrate on the aspect of ‘moral unity’ of humankind (Wight 1991: 7–8). Wight considered these to be the foundational paradigms or traditions of international relations, and he saw IR as a never-ending dialogue between these perspectives. One cannot plausibly suppose IR can be reduced to realism or to rationalism or to revolutionism without creating theoretical biases and blind spots.

None of these traditions is ‘true’ and none is ‘false’. They represent different basic outlooks on world politics that compete with each other. Each is incomplete in that it only captures one aspect or dimension of international relations. But together they play an indispensable role in IR theory. Realism is the ‘controlling’ or disciplining factor, revolutionism is the ‘vitalizing’ or energizing factor, and rationalism is the ‘civilizing’ or moderating factor in world politics. This balancing act is clearly how Wight (1991) approaches IR. However, it is fair to say that International Society theorists—taking the middle road—listen more carefully to the moderate voice of Grotian rationalism than to the Machiavellian or Kantian voices (Linklater and Suganami 2006: 31–2).

*Realism* is the doctrine that rivalry and conflict between states are ‘inherent’ in their relations. Realists emphasize ‘the element of anarchy, of power politics, and of warfare’ (Wight 1991: 15–24). Realism concentrates on the actual—what is—rather than the ideal—what ought to be. It involves the avoidance of wishful thinking and ‘the frank acceptance of the disagreeable side of life’. Realists, therefore, tend to be pessimistic about human nature: humankind is divided into ‘crooks and fools’, and realists survive and succeed by outsmarting the crooks and taking advantage of those who are stupid or naïve. That implies that world politics cannot progress but always remains basically the same from one time or place to another. Realism taken to the extreme is denial of an international society; what exists is a Hobbesian state of nature. The only political society and, indeed, moral community is the state. There are no international obligations beyond or between states.

*Revolutionists* identify themselves with universal human fulfilment however defined; e.g., common humanity (Kant), or the world proletariat (Marx), or the liberal end of history (Fukuyama 1989). They assume ‘the moral unity’ of human society beyond the state (Wight 1991: 8–12). They are ‘cosmopolitan’ rather than state-centric thinkers; solidarists rather than pluralists; and their international theory has a progressive and even a missionary character in that it aims at changing the world for the better and forever. Revolutionary social change to bring about a universal condition that is conducive to human fulfilment (however that may be defined) is the ultimate goal. History has a purpose; human beings have a destiny. Revolutionists are optimistic about human nature: they believe in human perfectibility. The ultimate purpose of international history is to enable humans to achieve fulfilment and freedom. Revolutionism taken to the extreme

**TABLE 5.2** Wight's three IR traditions

REALISM	RATIONALISM	REVOLUTIONISM
Anarchy	Society	Humanity
Power politics	Evolutionary change	Revolutionary change
Conflict and warfare	Peaceful coexistence	Global community
Pessimism	Hope without illusions	Utopianism
Based on Wight (1991: 47)		

is a claim that the only real society on earth is a world society consisting of every human being; that is, humankind.

*Rationalists* believe that humans are reasonable, can recognize the right thing to do, and can learn from their own and from others' mistakes (Wight 1991: 14–24). People can intelligently manage to live together even when they share no common government, as in the anarchical condition of international relations. The rationalist world-view when taken to the extreme is an accommodating world of mutual respect, concord, and the rule of law between states. In this way, rationalism defines a 'middle road' of international politics, separating the conservative realists on one side from the progressive revolutionists on the other (see Table 5.2).

### 5.3 Order and Justice

Martin Wight was essentially an historian of ideas who reflected on the dynamic interplay of foundational concepts and assumptions in international relations. Hedley Bull, on the other hand, was primarily a philosopher of world politics who tried to work out a systematic theory of international society. Both Wight and Bull saw IR theory as a branch of political theory under the influence of history. They believed it was only possible to theorize IR within the context of concrete historical events and episodes.

The main point of the anarchical society, according to Bull (1995: 16–19), is promotion and preservation of international *order*, which is defined as 'a pattern or disposition of international activity that sustains those goals of the society of states that are elementary, primary or universal'. He identifies four such goals: (1) preservation of international society; (2) upholding the independence of member states, maintaining peace, and helping to secure the normative foundations of all social life, which includes 'the limitation of violence' (expressed in the laws of war); (3) 'the keeping of promises' (expressed in the principle of reciprocity); and (4) 'the stability of possession' (expressed in the principle of mutual recognition of state sovereignty). According to Bull, these are the most fundamental goals of the anarchical society.

The primary responsibility for sustaining international order—order between states—belongs to the great powers, and is achieved by 'managing their relations with one another'. Bull adds the important qualifier that this is not an empirical statement about what great powers actually do. Rather, it is a normative statement of their special

#### BOX 5.4 Key Quotes: President Gorbachev on Soviet–US collaboration (1985)

You asked me what is the primary thing that defines Soviet–American relations. I think it is the immutable fact that whether we like one another or not, we can either survive or perish only together. The principal question that must be answered is whether we are at last ready to recognize that there is another way to live at peace with each other and whether we are prepared to switch our mentality and our mode of acting from a warlike to a peaceful track.

**Quoted from Kissinger (1994: 790)**

role and responsibility in world politics. He notes that ‘great powers, like small powers, frequently behave in such a way as to promote disorder rather than order’ (Bull 1995: 199–201). That, of course, happened on two major occasions in the twentieth century and shook the foundations of world politics: the First World War (1914–18) and the Second World War (1939–45).

Bull argued that during the 1960s and early 1970s the United States and the Soviet Union made some attempt to act ‘as responsible managers of the affairs of international society as a whole’. The Cold War at times produced international order. But he also said that at certain other times during the Cold War, specifically in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the two superpowers behaved more like ‘the great irresponsibles’, as they were prepared to sacrifice international order for the sake of their own interests (Bull 1980; see also Bull and Watson 1984: 437). That is the context for the reflections on the need for Soviet–US collaboration made by President Gorbachev in 1985 (see Box 5.4).

Bull’s argument on the balance of power comes very close to that of a moderate realist in Wight’s terms. He employed history to draw some important distinctions; for example, between a ‘simple balance of power’ and a ‘complex balance of power’. The former corresponds roughly to the realist concept of bipolarity; the latter corresponds roughly to the realist concept of multipolarity. In the same vein, he went on to use historical illustrations to distinguish between a general balance of power and a local balance of power. The general balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War could be distinguished from the local balance of power between Israel and the Arab states in the Middle East, or between India and Pakistan in South Asia. As we shall see, this point has recently been elaborated by Barry Buzan, who has introduced a distinction between the global and regional international societies.

Hedley Bull also uses historical and contemporary illustrations to make his argument about the nature of war in an anarchical society. Since 1945, international society has succeeded in limiting interstate war but not intrastate war. Wars between great powers have been almost non-existent—except for ‘wars fought “by proxy” between the superpowers’, such as the Korean War or the Vietnam War (Bull 1995: 187). Bull notes that ‘international war, as a determinant of the shape of the international system, has declined in relation to civil war’, which he attributed largely to the Cold War



stand-off between the superpowers, but which could also be attributed to the norms of the UN Charter, which outlaw aggressive war, and to international public opinion which stands behind them. These ‘wars of a third kind’ (Holsti 1996) have occurred since 1945 and even more since the end of the Cold War. They include revolutionary wars, wars of national liberation, civil wars, secessionist wars, and so forth. They are often ‘asymmetrical’ wars because they usually involve non-state actors and raise questions of human rights abuses and, therefore, of humanitarian responsibility in war, discussed later in this chapter. Bull died before our era of armed terrorists and wars against terrorism, but these wars, exemplified by the recent war against the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), are perhaps the best examples thus far of asymmetrical warfare.

Bull notes (1995: 179) that war between states is often contrasted unfavourably with peace between states, but that can be misleading. He points out that ‘the historical alternative to war between states was more ubiquitous violence’, such as the social anarchy that existed during the European medieval era before modern states monopolized the activity and means of warfare (see Chapter 1). Historically, the state system has sought to suppress such violence by restricting warfare to armed combat between states. So the monopoly of war by states has promoted the value of order (see Box 5.5). Here, again, the contemporary era of wars of a third kind are particularly vivid and very apt illustrations of Bull’s point about the dangers of social anarchy.

According to Bull, international society involves concerns not only about order but also about *justice*. He identifies various conceptions of justice, but he draws particular attention to the distinction in international relations between *commutative justice* and *distributive justice*. Commutative justice is about procedures and reciprocity. It involves ‘a process of claim and counter-claim’ among states. States are like firms in the marketplace; each firm does its best to succeed within the framework of economic competition. That presupposes a level playing field: all firms play by the same rules of the market; all states play by the same rules of international society. Justice is fairness of the rules of the game: the same rules are applied in the same way to everybody. The rules of the

#### BOX 5.5 Key Concepts: Bull’s rationalist conception of war as an institution

War is organized violence carried on by political units against each other ... We should distinguish between war in the loose sense of organized violence which may be carried out by any political unit (a tribe, an ancient empire, a feudal principality, a modern civil faction) and war in the strict sense of international or interstate war, organized violence waged by sovereign states. Within the modern states system only war in the strict sense, international war, has been legitimate; sovereign states have sought to preserve for themselves a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence ... In any actual hostilities to which we can give the name ‘war’, norms or rules, whether legal or otherwise, invariably play a part.

**Bull (1995: 178)**



**TABLE 5.3** Order and justice

ORDER	JUSTICE
Order in social life	Human justice
International order	Interstate justice
World order	World justice

game are expressed by international law and diplomatic practices. That is commutative justice, the principal form of international justice (see Table 5.3).

Distributive justice is about goods. It involves the issue of how goods should be distributed between states, as ‘exemplified by the idea that justice requires a transfer of economic resources from rich countries to poor’. International distributive justice is the idea that the world’s poor cannot be abandoned simply because they live in a foreign country; on the contrary, they deserve special treatment, such as development aid, which can address their misfortune or plight. That means that not all states play by the same rules: the rich and the strong have special obligations to the poor and the weak who have special rights. This form of justice takes a back seat to commutative justice because sovereign states are usually understood as the most appropriate framework within which issues of distributive justice ought to be resolved; in other words, distributive justice is usually understood as an issue of domestic politics rather than international politics. However, during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, issues of distributive justice have grown in importance as the globe has shrunk and the plight of unfortunate peoples in foreign countries has become more immediately apparent. It indicates a tendency towards greater solidarism in international relations.

Bull distinguishes three levels of justice in world politics: ‘international or interstate justice’, which basically involves the notion of equal state sovereignty; ‘individual or human justice’, which basically involves ideas of human rights and international humanitarian law; and ‘world justice’, which basically involves ‘what is right or good for the world as a whole’, as evident, for example, in global environmental standards. Historically, the interstate level has usually prevailed in world politics. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the latter two levels of justice became more prominent, but they did not overtake the interstate level, the level at which most issues of justice in world politics are still addressed.

Bull ends his discussion of order and justice by considering the relative weight of these two values in world politics. In his comparison, order is seen to be more fundamental: ‘it is a condition for the realization of other values’ (Bull 1995: 93). Order is prior to justice, because without order, justice becomes more difficult (if not impossible) to achieve. As stressed by Bull himself, this is a general statement, but in any particular case justice may come first. An example is the international justice of self-determination and state sovereignty for colonized peoples in Asia and Africa that was widely regarded as morally taking precedence over the international order of Western colonialism in those parts of the world. Bull’s main point is that world politics involves questions of both order and

justice, and that international relations cannot be adequately understood by focusing on either value to the exclusion of the other.

More recent scholarship has further developed these ideas (e.g., Duncombe and Dunne 2018). Especially prominent here has been a great debate over humanitarian intervention, which has pitted solidarist and pluralist voices within the International Society tradition; we return to it later in this chapter.

## 5.4 World Society

That brings us to the idea of a world society. This term refers to common interests and shared values that link ‘all parts of the human community’ (Bull 1995: 269–70). World society is often understood as existing in parallel with international society. Whereas international society is pluralist and rests on sovereign states, world society, by contrast, is solidarist and rests on the community of humankind and the ‘cosmopolitan culture of late modernity’ (Dunne et al. 2010). As defenders of humankind and protectors of human rights, sovereign states have an increasingly important place in acknowledging and upholding world society. This argument was already evident in the International Society theory of R. J. Vincent (1986) and Hedley Bull (1995). It has been expanded in subsequent International Society scholarship (e.g., Dunne and Wheeler 1999; 2004).

World society is seen to be manifested in various international organizations with a humanitarian purpose, particularly the protection of human rights. The UN Charter and its related declarations and conventions are typically seen as having laid the groundwork for the protection of human rights around the world. Subsequent ‘layers’ of cosmopolitan norms have been added via various human rights regimes, both global and regional. The most significant is the Council of Europe, which established a European Court of Human Rights. The jurists of that court can review cases brought to them on appeal from the final decisions of national courts of member states of the Council of Europe—if those states have acceded to that legal process. In those cases, the judgments of national supreme courts can be overturned by the European Court of Human Rights, as well as upheld by them. Regional war crimes tribunals, with a limited period of existence, have also been created in the past two decades to prosecute war crimes committed in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Cambodia. Individuals accused of having committed acts of genocide and other flagrant human rights violations have been brought before those tribunals, and some of them have been found guilty and have been punished in accordance with international law.

Since the end of the Cold War, a permanent tribunal—the International Criminal Court (ICC)—has been established, whose enacting Rome Statute has been endorsed by a large number of sovereign states, although by no means all of them. Three permanent members of the UN Security Council have refused to become parties to the Rome Statute: the United States, Russia, and China. Their absence registers a significant division of international society and the limits of its solidarity on the matter of humanitarian law enforcement. More recently, Russia has put its involvement with international society in jeopardy by interfering with the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine, for example, by annexing Crimea in 2014 and by supplying military assistance to separatists in the eastern part of the country. Other world leaders, including Recep Erdoğan in Turkey and Donald Trump

in the US, have also signalled a lukewarm attitude to international organizations and obligations. However, there can be no doubt that world society has become an increasingly significant feature of international relations since the end of the Cold War.

Some International Society scholars argue that such developments register a ‘clear shift from an international society to a world society’ (Armstrong 1999). That suggests incompatibility between an international society and a world society: progress towards the latter constitutes movement away from the former. It would seem to mean that the spread of humanitarianism and human rights marks a decline of state sovereignty, and the right of non-intervention. It may even point to the transformation of international society into a world society with shared values and common interests and concerns. That would be a shift—presumably irreversible—from rationalism to revolutionism in Martin Wight’s terms, or from pluralism to solidarism in Hedley Bull’s terms.

Other scholars point out that the human rights regimes of contemporary world society have not come into existence independently from the society of states. On the contrary, they have been brought into existence by the humanitarian concerns and efforts of member states of international society, especially—although not exclusively—by the Western democracies (Jackson 2006). It has been argued that sovereign states, particularly Western states, are not only the principal authors of international human rights law, but they are also the principal protectors of human rights. As Bull (1995) argued, this suggests that an international society based on state sovereignty is not inconsistent with a world society of human rights. This subject has been further explored by Andrew Hurrell (2007), who boldly defends the notion of a world society based on respect for human rights (see also Navari and Green 2014).

This debate relates directly to the distinction between ‘pluralism’ and ‘solidarism’ in the International Society approach. As mentioned above, Bull leaned to the pluralist side. Following Bull, many scholars have castigated solidarism for its naïve idea that the world society can do away with the primacy of states in international relations. Indeed, many pluralists see a great danger in such universalist pretensions, which might sow conflict by riding roughshod over the fact that ends pursued and values cherished differ across individuals, states, and cultures. Pluralists here echo a message that has been forcefully stated by the English historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin (see Box 5.6).

However, as Buzan (2014: 115) points out, solidarism comes in two versions: ‘state-centric’ and ‘cosmopolitan’. State-centric solidarists see states as the main promoter

#### BOX 5.6 Key Quotes: Isaiah Berlin on pluralism

But equally it seems to me that the belief that some single formula can in principle be found whereby all the diverse ends of men can be harmoniously realised is demonstrably false. If, as I believe, the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict—and of tragedy—can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social.

**Berlin (2012: 239)**

of human rights in the international realm; cosmopolitan solidarists see human rights as standing above states. Buzan (2014) observes that the pluralist criticism is normally addressed at cosmopolitan solidarism—‘the bogeyman that threatens international order’ (118)—and that it often ignores the state-centric position within solidarism. As Buzan (2014: 121) shows, state-centric solidarism actually fits rather well with Bull’s thinking; it was the cosmopolitan position that he rejected. Based on this distinction, the differences between pluralism and solidarism might not be as large as they appear; here, too, there seems to be room for a *via media*, a middle way. One way to approach this is by going back to Bull’s original work. At a closer reading, he describes two different versions of international society, one based on pluralism and another based on solidarism (state-centric or cosmopolitan). These he distinguished from world society. It is scholars such as Dunne who have attempted to collapse cosmopolitan solidarism and world society, or at least move the two closer to each other. Another way of conceiving of Bull’s original distinctions would be to introduce a form of continuum where pluralism is one extreme, world society another, with solidarism placed at the centre (Williams 2014).

## 5.5 Statecraft and Responsibility

The International Society approach leads to the study of normative choices in foreign policy with which responsible statespeople are confronted (Jackson 2000). We can discern at least three distinctive dimensions or levels of responsibility which correspond to Wight’s three traditions noted earlier: (1) devotion to one’s own nation and the well-being of its citizens; (2) respect for the legitimate interests and rights of other states and for international law; and (3) respect for human rights (see Table 5.4).

### 5.5.1 National Responsibility

According to this conception, statespeople are responsible for the well-being of their citizens. National security is the foundational value they are duty-bound to protect. This standard for evaluating foreign policies gives rise to Machiavellian precepts, such as: always put your nation and its citizens first; avoid taking unnecessary risks with their security and welfare; collaborate with other countries when it is advantageous or necessary but avoid needless foreign entanglements; and do not subject your population to war unless it is absolutely necessary. These normative considerations are characteristic of a system of autonomous states; i.e., realism.

**TABLE 5.4** Four forms of responsibility

	RESPONSIBLE TO WHOM?	RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT?
National	Our citizens	National security
International	Other states	International order, peace, and security

What is the basis for claiming that statespeople are only responsible for defending the national interest? The answer can be derived from a familiar theory of political obligation which regards the state as a self-contained political community that is morally and legally superior to any international associations it may subsequently join. States are seen to have no international obligations that come before their national interests: international law and international organizations are merely instrumental considerations in determining the national interest of states. In other words, states are good international citizens because it is in their national interests.

### 5.5.2 International Responsibility

According to this conception, statespeople have foreign obligations deriving from their state's membership of international society, which involves rights and duties as defined by international law. This interstate standard for evaluating foreign policies gives rise to Grotian precepts, such as: recognize that other states have international rights and legitimate interests which deserve respect; act in good faith; observe international law; and comply with the laws of war. These normative considerations are characteristic of a pluralist society of states based on international law; i.e., rationalism (see Box 5.7).

What is the normative basis for believing that statespeople have a separate responsibility to international society and its members? The usual answer comes from a conception of international obligation: states are not isolated or autonomous political entities, responsible only to their own people. On the contrary, states are related to each other, and they acknowledge the sovereignty of each other by the activities of recognition, diplomacy, commerce, and so on. States consequently have foreign obligations to other states and to international society as a whole from which they reciprocally and jointly obtain important rights and benefits. That is the heart of the traditional International Society approach.

### 5.5.3 Humanitarian Responsibility

According to this conception, statespeople are first and foremost human beings and as such they have a fundamental obligation to respect human rights not only in their own country but also in all countries around the world. This cosmopol-

#### **BOX 5.7** Key Quotes: President Franklin Roosevelt on international responsibility (1945)

Nothing is more essential to the future peace of the world than continued cooperation of the nations which had to muster the force necessary to defeat the conspiracy of the Axis powers to dominate the world. While the great states have a special responsibility to enforce the peace, their responsibility is based upon the obligations resting upon all states, large and small, not to use force in international relations except in defence of law.

**Cited in Kissinger (1994: 427)**

tan standard for evaluating foreign policies gives rise to Kantian precepts, such as: always remember that people in other countries are human beings just like yourself; respect human rights; give sanctuary to those who are fleeing from persecution; assist those who are in need of material aid which you can supply at no sacrifice to yourself; and in waging war, spare non-combatants. These normative considerations are characteristic of a solidarist world society based on the community of humankind; i.e., revolutionism.

This cosmopolitan criterion of responsible statecraft obviously goes well beyond international responsibility. What is the normative basis for believing that statespeople are responsible for human rights around the world? The usual answer derives from a theory of human obligation: before one can be a citizen of a state and a member of its government, one must be a human being. We are all born as humans, but we are each made into citizens of different countries. The traditional way of expressing one's obligations as a human being is by claiming that there is a 'natural law', a universal law of reason and of conscience, and 'natural rights'—what we now call 'human rights' and 'international humanitarian law'—which statespeople no less than any other people are duty-bound to respect (see Box 5.8).

If these criteria and precepts are mutually operative standards of conduct, it becomes clear that we should expect normative dilemmas and conflicts to be a feature of contemporary statecraft. It is equally clear that all three of these dimensions of responsibility must be a focus of analysis. To reduce responsible statecraft to only one or two of these dimensions is to carry out at best a partial analysis and at worst a biased account that would underestimate the normative complexity of international relations and consequently the actual difficulty of making normatively defensible choices in foreign policy. No criterion can predictably trump all other considerations in all circumstances. There is an underlying normative **pluralism** from which statespeople cannot escape, which IR scholars should not ignore, and which perhaps is what Wight (1991) is referring to when he says he encountered all three perspectives when he canvassed his own mind on such questions.

#### **BOX 5.8** Key Concepts: Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev on humanitarian responsibility

Wherever threats to democracy and human rights occur, let alone violations thereof, the international community can and must contribute to their removal ... Such measures are regarded today not as interference in internal affairs but as assistance and cooperation ensuring everywhere a 'most favoured regime' for the life of the peoples—one consistent with each state's human rights commitments under the UN Charter, international covenants and other relevant instruments.

**Quoted from Weller (1993)**

## 5.6 Humanitarian Responsibility and War

Since the end of the Cold War, the UN Security Council has passed resolutions which authorize the use of armed force to address major humanitarian crises inside member states which are seen to present a threat to international peace and security. Among the countries targeted by these resolutions have been Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo (Serbia), East Timor (Indonesia), Libya, and the Ivory Coast. These resolutions connect human rights to international peace and security and in so doing can be interpreted as establishing a solidarist international society norm of humanitarian intervention and humanitarian war. The absence in the UN Charter of articles that *explicitly* authorize the use of armed force to protect human rights or for other humanitarian purposes has been seen by many Western countries, by some other countries, and by humanitarian NGOs as a deficiency that ought to be corrected. This justification of war has come to be known as the **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)** doctrine (Evans 2008). Proponents of the doctrine have accordingly sought to justify the international use of armed force beyond 'self-defence' and 'international peace and security' by adding 'military intervention for human protection purposes' (see Box 5.9). That solidarist norm of human protection by military force would be invoked whenever there was 'serious and irreparable harm occurring to human beings, or imminently likely to occur'. It would be triggered by 'large-scale loss of life, actual or apprehended' produced by 'deliberate state action, or state neglect or inability to act, or a failed state situation'. It would also be triggered by 'large-scale "ethnic cleansing," actual or apprehended'. States where such human catastrophes occurred could no longer hide behind their sovereignty.

Proponents of the solidarist norm of armed humanitarianism also argue that human protection by armed force is made necessary by the emergence of various kinds of 'asymmetrical warfare' in the post-Cold War era (Gross 2010). Such warfare includes internal or civil wars, armed anarchy within **failed states**, forced expulsion of unwanted populations usually in the form of 'ethnic cleansing', and, of course, terrorism. None of those activities are addressed by the UN Charter in its articles dealing with armed conflict. That is often seen as a deficiency which ought to be corrected for the sake of protecting humanity under international law.

The clearest case to date of an instance of humanitarian responsibility in war explicitly justified by the Responsibility to Protect doctrine is the 2011 intervention

### BOX 5.9 Key Concepts: The Responsibility to Protect (R2P): core principles

- A. State sovereignty implies responsibility, and the primary responsibility for the protection of its people lies with the state itself.
- B. Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect.

in Libya by NATO air forces (and forces from a few other countries) to protect the country's civilian population from armed attack by the violent regime of Muammar Gaddafi. The intervention was authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 1973. The air power of NATO and some of its members, particularly France, Britain, and the United States, was authorized 'to protect civilians and civilian populated areas' of Libya that were under attack by armed forces loyal to Gaddafi. NATO carried out its mission and helped bring an end to the humanitarian crisis (see Box 5.10). However, Libya subsequently deteriorated into a condition of armed anarchy and warfare that is characteristic of a failed state, and a number of states, including Russia and China, complained that NATO had overstepped the mandate given in UN Security Council resolution 1973 by offensive bombings designed to trigger a regime change in Libya.

The adoption of this solidarist norm of humanitarian intervention and war remains controversial and many states continue to object to it. Yet, the humanitarian concerns which it reflects are beyond question. There can be no doubt that many states fail, some to an alarming degree, in their responsibility to protect the human rights of their populations, or they are militarily incapable of protecting them, or they lack the will. Some even launch armed attacks on their own populations. And there can be no doubt that this has raised great humanitarian concern, not only among many individuals or NGOs but also among some very important international organizations and an increasing number of sovereign states, including some of the major powers.

Nevertheless, there are important normative issues posed by the Responsibility to Protect doctrine when analysed from a pluralist international society perspective. The first and most recurrent objection is the claim that it undermines the norm of non-intervention as enshrined in Art. 2 of the UN Charter. That undoubtedly is the main objection of non-Western governments who fear that the doctrine will weaken their authority and open the way to neo-colonial military interference in their part of the world (Ayooob 2004; Forsythe 2017). The second objection is the claim that the doctrine involves a significant and troubling expansion of the right of war beyond the restrictions placed upon it by the UN Charter in 1945. The third objection is the concern that the doctrine runs the risk of deeply dividing the great powers. The fourth objection is the concern that humanitarian intervention will be abandoned by Western states that engage in it, if casualties among their own soldiers increase to the point where the intervention will not be supported by their publics (see Knudsen 1996). That could leave the target country in even greater turmoil, which arguably happened in Libya (see Box 5.10).

This emergent solidarist norm of justifiable war remains a controversial development and cannot yet be regarded as a universal standard accepted by virtually every member state of the UN. What is beyond doubt, however, is the fact that humanitarianism and human rights have become important justifications for armed intervention and war by the UN, by many of its significant member states, and by prominent international organizations such as NATO and the EU. The solidarist conception of international society has thus become manifest with regard to one of the most vital subjects of international relations, namely the lawful and legitimate use of armed force.



### BOX 5.10 Key Developments: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011) on Libya

*Determining* that the situation in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya continues to constitute a threat to international peace and security, *Acting* under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations,

1. *Demands* the immediate establishment of a ceasefire and a complete end to violence and all attacks against, and abuses of, civilians;
2. *Stresses* the need to intensify efforts to find a solution to the crisis which responds to the legitimate demands of the Libyan people;
3. *Demands* that the Libyan authorities comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law and take all measures to protect civilians and meet their basic needs, and to ensure the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian assistance;
4. *Authorizes* Member States that have notified the Secretary-General, acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements, and acting in cooperation with the Secretary-General, to take all necessary measures ... to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

## 5.7 History and the International Society Approach

The International Society approach emphasizes the importance of history to international relations (Bain 2007: 514). Several of its most important figures, including Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, were themselves historians, and others, including Hedley Bull, Adam Watson, and Barry Buzan, see historical investigations—whether empirically or for analytic purposes—as integral to the study of international relations. The main aim of these historical investigations has been to understand the development of state systems and international societies, respectively. Two historical projects have dominated. With reference to the works of Bull and Watson's (1984) *The Expansion of International Society* and Watson's (1992) *The Evolution of International Society*, Buzan (2014: 44–5) terms these the *expansion* story and the *evolution* story:

- The *expansion* story: Understanding how the present international society came into being via an expansion of the European system.
- The *evolution* story: Understanding similarities and differences between historical state systems and international societies.

The first, *expansion* story, is central to Hedley Bull's work in the *Anarchical Society* (see Bull 1977; Bull and Watson 1984). It includes a two-fold investigation of the origins and development of the European state system, which by the nineteenth century had developed into a truly international society. Emphasis lies on the emergence of the balance of power as an institution promoted and sustained by the great powers. This occurred via a series of twists and turns, mostly connected with failed attempts to create hegemony

### BOX 5.11 Key Developments: The Concert of Europe

The nineteenth-century **Concert of Europe**, which the five strongest powers [Austria, France, Great Britain, Prussia and Russia] agreed to operate together, was a collective hegemony tempered by the balance of power ... How well did it work in practice? In the first period, the informal pentarchy functioned adequately to preserve order and peace, while managing a degree of change and acquiring a certain legitimacy. In the second period, it functioned less well: collective authority was loosened by the forces of change and the nationalist desire for unfettered independence, and minor wars occurred between the five members of the concert.

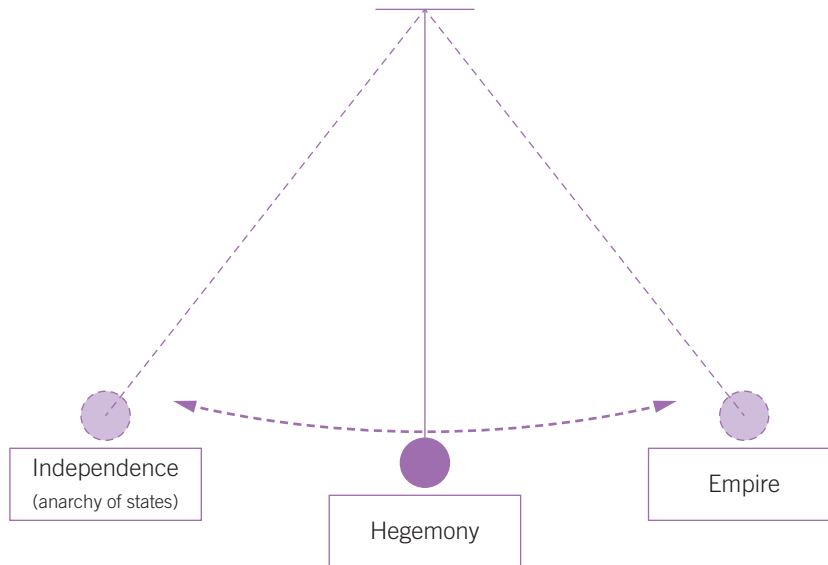
**Watson (1992: 255)**

over the European system. The aborted attempts include those of the Spanish Habsburgs in the sixteenth century, the French Bourbons in the seventeenth century, and Napoleon Bonaparte after the French Revolution in 1789 (see also Watson 1992; see also Chapter 11). These developments culminated in the so-called Concert of Europe (see Box 5.11), which was an ambitious and institutionalized cooperation between the European great powers that contributed to maintaining peace in Europe after the Napoleonic wars had ended in 1815.

The Concert can in many ways be seen as the pinnacle of European international society, at least viewed from the vantage point of the period when Bull wrote. Nineteenth-century international society had been a family affair, confined to the Western countries and Russia. Not even the Ottomans were included into it, as cultural barriers kept them apart (Watson 1992: 257–9). The European international society therefore rested on cultural homogeneity, something that explains why it was so stable and so finely developed in this period. After the Second World War, the international society had gradually engulfed the entire globe. But Bull followed Wight in worrying that the lack of a common culture would weaken this global international society (see also Watson 1992).

One paradoxical aspect of this weakening of international society arises from the decolonization of the second half of the twentieth century. On the one hand, this decolonization, by lifting the European yoke and granting countries in Asia and Africa their independence, extended international society to the entire world. On the other hand, it weakened international society because it created a more heterogeneous set of states, many of which were internally porous. This two-fold process figures prominently in International Society scholarship. A landmark contribution is Robert Jackson's (1990) book *Quasi-States*. As described in Chapter 1, quasi-states are characterized by possessing juridical statehood but being severely deficient in empirical statehood, and they have become an increasingly important aspect of the world of states since the 1960s (see also Bain 2003).

The second, *evolution* story, figured importantly in the initial research agenda of the British Committee, and an early contribution was that of Wight (1977). But the main contribution is Watson's (1992) *The Evolution of International Society*, which takes up the task

**FIGURE 5.1** Time's Pendulum

Based on Buzan (2014: 54). Reproduced with permission from Polity Press.

of finishing the comparative historical work envisioned by particularly Wight and Bull. Buzan and Little (2009: xxvi) declare Watson's book the 'culmination of the work of the British Committee'. In it, Watson compares state-systems from the Sumerian to the present global one. He launches a theory which he illustrates with his metaphor of 'Time's Pendulum', swinging from empire at one extreme to independence at the other (see Figure 5.1). Empire may be defined as a hierarchical system between an imperial government and its various dependencies, in which sovereignty is held exclusively by that government and is exercised as supremacy or dominion over its dependencies. Independence is the anarchical world of neorealism where each state determines its own domestic and foreign policy.

Empire is sustained by the practical wish for order, independence by the emotional wish to rule oneself (Watson 1992: 125). Both extremes are unstable, and historically we always see a pull towards the centre of the pendulum. According to Watson (1992: 17), this midpoint, where the pendulum most often rests, is hegemony, which means that one state is able to lay down the law of the international system for others while allowing them domestic independence. As Buzan (2014: 54) points out, Watson's Pendulum-theory challenges not only the neorealist notion of the staying power of anarchy but also 'the general linkage between anarchy and international society in much of English School writing'.

According to Watson (1992: 123), the pull towards hegemony is especially strong where international systems are embedded in a common culture. This observation raises intriguing questions about the European system, where we find such a common culture, but which deviates from the historical norm of hegemony. Indeed, from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century it has stayed close to the independence side of the spectrum. But even in the European system, Watson identifies repeated pulls towards hegemony which sometimes came very close to succeeding, most notoriously under

Napoleon Bonaparte. Watson approvingly quotes Wight's observation that the European system was characterized by 'a succession of hegemonies', each sparking anti-hegemonial activities (Watson 1992: 252). Watson (1992: 255–6) more specifically argues that we find several examples of *de facto* hegemony but—as opposed to most of the other historical systems he investigates—there was no single power strong enough to establish the *principle* of hegemony.

A good example of the present-day relevance of the evolution story is Buzan's (2014) suggestion that it is valuable to analyse 'regional international societies'. This idea is present in an incipient form in both Bull (1977) and Watson (1992) as all the international societies they identify up until the modern, global one, were regional (say, ancient Greece, Warring States China, and nineteenth-century Europe). Buzan's suggestion is to analyse how regional international societies, based on relatively strong common cultures, are today embedded in a looser global international society. Of particular relevance is the advent or reemergence of an East Asian international society centred on China (Buzan 2014: 45–7, 57–9, 180).

Bull and Watson's historical analyses have been criticized for being vague with respect to methodology. As Linklater and Suganami (2006: 89–91) point out, it is unclear how history is used by Bull and Watson. Is it to develop theory, to apply theory empirically, or simply to illustrate theoretical arguments? Is the point that 'theory is integral to history' (Linklater and Suganami 2006: 95)? International Society theorists have not given clear answers to these questions, though some attempts have been made (e.g., Bain 2007). This points to a more general methodological criticism of the approach, which centres on the lack of clear standards of inquiry (Finnemore 2001). We return to this criticism below. The expansion story has also been criticized for being too Eurocentric. The main objection here is that it has ignored two-way interactions, including how the Ottomans or the Chinese affected Europe during its expansion (Buzan 2014: 72). One is here tempted to repeat Goldstone's (2000: 176–7) ironic quip that the European colonizers have colonized history.

## 5.8 Critiques of International Society

Several other major criticisms can be made of the International Society approach to IR. First, there is the realist critique that the evidence that states and statespeople subscribe to international norms is weak or non-existent. Second, there is the liberal critique that the International Society tradition downplays domestic politics—e.g., democracy—and cannot account for progressive change in international politics. Third, there is the IPE critique that it fails to give an account of international economic relationships. Finally, there are several solidarist critiques that emerge from within the International Society tradition itself that focus on its limitations—perhaps its failure—as a theory to come to grips with an emerging postmodern world.

The realist critique of the International Society approach rests on a deep scepticism of an 'international society', as Hedley Bull (1995: 13) characterizes it, namely as a group of states that 'conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions'. Realists believe

states are bound only by their own national interests. Where is the evidence, they ask, that states are also 'bound by certain rules ... that they should respect one another's claims to independence, that they should honour agreements into which they enter, and that they should be subject to certain limitations in exercising force against one another' (Bull 1995: 13). States may respect such rules, but only because it is in their own interest. When there is conflict between international obligations and national interests, the latter always win, because the fundamental concern of states is always their own advantage, and ultimately their own security and survival (see Chapter 3).

The International Society approach is not as soft a target as the realist critique claims. As pointed out, realism is built into the approach as one of its three basic elements. Wight (1966a) characterizes IR as a 'theory of survival', which is an acknowledgement of the primacy of states, their right to exist, and the legitimacy of their interests. International anarchy remains central to the approach. But, as demonstrated by the title of Bull's (1977) most famous book, *The Anarchical Society*, the International Society approach does not stop there. It emphasizes that states bind themselves to other states via treaties, and that the justification for that can be more than merely self-interest (realism), or even enlightened self-interest (moderate realism). It emphasizes that states have legitimate interests that other states recognize and respect; it also emphasizes that states recognize the general advantages of observing a principle of reciprocity in international affairs (rationalism). These ideas were prominently developed by Martin Wight (1966b) in an early essay on 'Western Values'. If states really acted the way realists claim, there would be no binding treaties, because no state could be expected to keep their promise when it was no longer in their interest to do so. Yet, binding treaties are commonplace in world politics.

Liberals have directed most of their critical attention at realism, and the debate between liberals (or idealists) and realists was the most conspicuous IR debate of the twentieth century. However, one implied liberal critique is the lack of interest of International Society theorists in the role of domestic politics in international relations. Like realists, International Society theorists are not inclined to investigate the domestic aspects of foreign policy. A second implied liberal critique derives from the claim that liberal democracies are more peace-loving than non-democratic political systems. Here, republican liberals are criticizing not only realists but also—by implication—International Society theorists who tend to ignore this subject. A third implied liberal critique is the inability of the International Society approach to account for progressive change in international relations. Wight (1966a: 33) claims that domestic politics is a sphere of progressive change, but that international politics is a sphere of recurrence and repetition and IR is thus basically a 'theory of survival'. This view is identical to that of realism. Liberals emphasize how secondary institutions—what Bull (1977: xiv) terms 'pseudo-institutions'—serve to change international relations. Most International Society theorists follow Bull in seeing these institutions as much less important than the 'primary institutions' of the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, great power management, and war. The secondary institutions thus only become possible due to the prior existence of the primary institutions, and they are in turn shaped by the way these first-order institutions work. For instance, the UN Security Council is an attempt

to formalize, maintain, and further regulate the stable practices that have been created by the balance of power, and its operation is bound by these general practices.

However, Bull's own work on the anarchical society is peppered with references to secondary institutions as the manifestation of the more fundamental institutions of international society, and he also turns to them in order to understand changes in these first-order institutions. For instance, he argues that the establishment of the UN pushed international society in a solidarist direction. Much later work within the International Society tradition has emphasized the importance of international organizations. Recent scholarship has attempted to come full circle by making the case that the two sets of institutions are mutually constitutive. The idea here is that secondary institutions not only manifest primary institutions but systematically prop them up and might even contribute to transforming them (Knudsen and Navari 2019). Over time, formalized international organizations socialize states in ways that affect the practices and habits of their interaction. Changes in secondary institutions might herald changes in primary institutions and hence potentially a transformation in the nature of international society. This happens incrementally as international organizations affect the practices of international society. For example, recent scholarship has seen the growth of 'secondary institutions' such as environmental regimes and intergovernmental institutions as evidence that environmental stewardship is emerging as a primary institution of international society (Buzan and Falkner 2019). Another example concerns the International Criminal Court, which has allegedly pushed international society in a more solidarist direction (Knudsen and Navari 2019). International Society scholars thus do not ignore the importance of secondary institutions.

The main criticism that IPE scholars direct at the International Society approach is its neglect of economics and the social-class aspect of international relations. International Society scholars have only a limited defence against such a criticism, because the fact is that Martin Wight and Hedley Bull give their overwhelming attention to international politics and largely ignore international economics (see also Buzan 2014: 76). There is little explicit discussion of economic issues in their writings. However, economics are not entirely ignored (see Mayall 1982). Wight (1991) includes in his definition of rationalism the idea of 'commerce' as one of the basic relations between sovereign states. Bull (1995) explores the role of 'economic factors in international relations' and specifically of 'multinational corporations', 'regional economic associations', and 'transnational society'. Robert Jackson (1990) investigates the role of 'international development assistance', 'Third World debt', and the obstacles and hurdles that existing international society based on state sovereignty puts in the way of developing countries.

The 'transnational society' critique basically argues that international society conceived in terms of a 'society of states' is deficient because it fails to take into account 'the transnational activities of individuals, firms, interest associations and social groups' (Peterson 1992). The state 'does not monopolize the public sphere' and, accordingly, the relations of states do not exhaust international relations. These transnational actors and activities should be neither underestimated nor overestimated: they 'coexist' with sovereign states and interstate relations. International relations are both public and private. There is an international 'civil society' that consists of various transnational actors, but

the operation of that society ‘relies on the state’ to provide ‘the conditions under which it can flourish’ (Peterson 1992). Those conditions include peace, security, and reciprocity—in other words, Bull’s basic goals of international order. International Society scholars consequently argue that transnational actors and activities are ultimately dependent upon favourable international conditions—peace, stability, lawfulness, free movement of goods and people, etc.—which only states and the society of states can bring about. As Jackson (2000) points out, international civil society is important but operates within the normative framework of international society (see Table 5.5 and Table 5.6).

That pinpoints the debate between the traditional International Society theorists of IR (see Table 5.3) and their transnational critics. The question is: how significant are these conditions, and how important is the state in providing them? It is hard to see any practical and viable alternative to the state at present. If the state is the only institution that can provide peace, security, and reciprocity, then the transnational critique loses relevance and becomes merely an added, secondary feature of international society which is still, basically, a society of states. If transnational society flourishes in the conditions of the society of states, the transnational critique is less a critique of the traditional International Society approach than an amendment or modest reform which expands on that approach by including secondary features that paint a more complete picture.

The ‘global society’ critique basically argues that International Society is deficient because it operates with ‘a fundamentally state-centric approach’ which regards states as actors ‘akin to individuals’, and neglects ‘the complex social relations which bind individuals and states’ (Shaw 1992). International Society theory is really a thinly disguised ideology which serves the purpose of justifying the system of sovereign states. The core of this critique is the Marxist claim that there is a primary world society in existence in

TABLE 5.5 Three traditional critiques of International Society		
REALISM	LIBERALISM	IPE
Weak evidence of norms	Ignores domestic society	Ignores economics
Interests dominate	Ignores democracy	Ignores developing world
	Ignores progress	

TABLE 5.6 Three solidarist critiques of International Society		
TRANSNATIONAL SOCIETY	GLOBAL SOCIETY	GLOBAL INJUSTICE
State and non-state	Anti-statist	Anti-statist
Transnational activities	Complex global relations	Global protection racket
International civil society	World society	Human wrongs
Public-private coexistence		World injustice



relation to which the society of states is secondary and subordinate. World society is the basic structure. The society of states is only a 'superstructure', to borrow a Marxist term. International Society theorists dispense an 'ideology' of state primacy, the national interest, the law of nations, and so on, which conceals that underlying materialist 'reality'.

A response that International Society theorists might make to Shaw's critique is to point to the way that statespeople actually conceive of and exercise responsibility in world politics, which is by giving priority first to their own citizens (national responsibility), second to other states (international responsibility), and only third to human beings, regardless of their citizenship or to the world as a whole. In other words, the ethic of pluralism is more significant than that of **solidarism** in shaping and taking responsibility in world politics. This response probably would not satisfy Shaw because it fails to address the basis of his critique, which is Marxist materialism. You have to decide whether the state and, by extension, the society of states, are more or less important than other international relations in world politics, such as economic relationships.

The 'global injustice' critique acknowledges that state interests and concerns still have primacy in world politics, but goes on to make a cosmopolitan critique of the morality, or rather the immorality, of the sovereign state. Ken Booth (1995) argues that international society conceived in terms of a 'society of states' sacrifices human beings on the altar of the sovereign state. Statism is the problem rather than the solution as far as human well-being is concerned (see Table 5.6). Booth thus extends Shaw's critique by arguing that statespeople, far from acting responsibly, have created an exclusive club—the society of states—whose rules of equal sovereignty and non-intervention exist to serve their own selfish interests at the expense of a suffering humanity. International Society theorists, by trying to understand and appreciate the difficult choices that statespeople face, actually end up by apologizing for their actions and being 'fetishizers [*sic*] of Foreign Offices' (Booth, quoted from Wheeler 1996).

Finally, there has been a widespread methodological critique of the International Society approach. We have already mentioned that it is not clear exactly how Wight, Bull and Watson use history in their analyses (Bain 2007). This reflects a more general problem, namely that the International Society approach is characterized by a very vague logic of inquiry—or even by methodological unawareness. How do we, in empirical terms, know whether we are dealing with an international system or an international society? (Linklater and Suganami 2006: 81–2). How do we know a primary institution such as the balance of power when we see it (Buzan 2014: 176)? This criticism was forcefully raised by Finnemore (2001), who argued that it goes a long way towards explaining the lack of traction of the approach in American IR. Another example can be found by comparing the work of International Society theorists to that of constructivists. As has repeatedly been pointed out, the International Society approach anticipates constructivism by arguing that international society is socially constructed. But, as opposed to constructivists, International Society theorists have not presented full-bodied ideas about how social interactions create institutions that can change identities and interests (Buzan 2014: 33–4; see also Wendt 1992). Alexander Wendt has, accordingly, criticized Bull's distinction between an international system and international society by



pointing out that both require constitutive rules, meaning that the fundamental difference between the two evaporates (Linklater and Suganami 2006: 53).

Bull (1969) did enter what we have termed the second debate via a forceful attack on behaviouralism and its idea that causal analysis is possible in social science (see Chapter 2). But he was less forceful in formulating a methodological alternative. International society theorists have taken one or both of two approaches in order to turn the tables on the methodological criticism of Finnemore and others. First, many have—following Bull—rejected the purchase or possibility of causal analysis in IR in favour of e.g., a Weberian use of ideal types or some kind of interpretivism (see Jackson 2016). Work in the tradition very rarely attempts to be causal in the mainstream sense that has dominated especially American IR (Bain 2007). Second, it has been pointed out that methodological pluralism is in fact one of the main strengths of the International Society approach (Linklater and Suganami 2006: 84). Here, we are back at the notion that the approach makes up a ‘broad church’.

## 5.9 Research Agenda after the Cold War

Since the end of the Cold War, the research agenda of International Society has expanded and changed to a degree. Not only has there been a shift of scholarly concern in the direction of justice, there has also been a movement away from a concern about international justice and towards a concern about human justice. There has been an enlargement of the subject to include issues of world justice—such as environmental protection or the law of the sea—and the question of what shape International Society might take in the future if state sovereignty ceases to be the foundation institution of world politics, as it has been for the past three or four centuries. Finally, there has been a methodological critique which seeks to move away from the classical approach towards a more strictly social science approach to the subject.

This raises the age-old question of state sovereignty. We still live in a world of sovereign states and there is a strong feeling, in our democratic age, that countries should govern themselves and should not be governed by foreigners, whether they are colonial powers or international organizations. However, the same democratic age has produced numerous declarations of human rights and other international commitments which reduce, at least in theory, the sphere of state sovereignty. Thirty years ago, John Vincent (1990) observed that ‘boundaries’ between domestic societies, and international society became ‘fuzzier’ in the last half of the twentieth century with the accumulation of many international declarations and conventions on human rights. In other words, there is an ambiguous and confusing relation in international law today between the responsibilities of national citizenship on the one hand, and universal human rights on the other. A leading item on the research agenda of International Society has been the analysis of that ambiguity in contemporary world politics.

John Vincent and Peter Wilson (1993) argue in more reformist International Society terms that a new idea of ‘international legitimacy’ is emerging because the international law of human rights ‘opens up the state to scrutiny from outsiders and propels us beyond non-intervention’. There is a ‘new order of things’, an interdependent and transnational world that is ‘nudging international society in the direction of a world society’. They argue that the pluralist society of states based on the principle of non-intervention ‘has now

been replaced by a much more complex world'. They call for a cosmopolitan or solidarist theory of International Society 'which recognizes that the principle of non-intervention no longer sums up the morality of states'. Another area where we can see an expanding research agenda is 'the greening' of International Society theory (Hurrell and Kingsbury 1992). It is often believed that the environment presents normative problems to which international society cannot respond in the usual terms of state sovereignty and international law. For example, Robert Goodin (1990) considers 'that the traditional structure of international law—guided as it is by notions of autonomous national actors with strong rights that all other national actors similarly share—is wildly inappropriate to many of the new environmental challenges'. This argument suggests that traditional international society based on state sovereignty is beyond its useful life, and now serves more as an obstacle than an asset as far as addressing world environmental problems is concerned.

Traditional International Society theorists argue that the society of states is more flexible and adaptable than that critique implies. They see no reason why international society cannot be made greener by conventional means of international environmental law and international environmental organizations. Indeed, only if sovereign states get involved will environmental problems gain the recognition and environmental norms the respect they deserve. Seen from this vantage point, international law has not obstructed or even discouraged environmental concerns; on the contrary, it has been employed and adjusted to accommodate and, indeed, to promote such concerns (Birnie 1992) by fitting them into the practices of state sovereignty. As the above discussion indicates, there has been an enlargement of the scope of International Society theory well beyond its traditional focus on state sovereignty and the society of states; Buzan and Falkner (2019) even argue that environmental stewardship is an emerging primary institution of international society (see Chapter 11).

Lastly, there has been a methodological shift from the classical approach of Martin Wight and Hedley Bull towards a more strictly social science approach to the subject. This is partly a response to the methodological criticism, mentioned previously, that causal analysis has been underprivileged or at least underdeveloped in the International Society approach. The emphasis here is on international society as a distinctive 'form of social structure'. This approach 'is about finding sets of analytical constructs with which to describe and theorise about what goes on in the world, and in that sense it is a positivist approach' (Buzan 2014: 79). At this point, the study of international society is not very different from some realist approaches, as discussed in Chapter 3.

## 5.10 Integrating International and Domestic Factors

To what extent does the International Society approach allow scholars to analyse the interplay between international and domestic factors? This question is not easy to answer. On the one hand, the very idea of the approach is that one needs to understand the actions of statesmen and that e.g., the balance of power is not an inevitable consequence of international competition. This is much the same as saying that the domestic level must be factored in to understand International Relations. Being a 'broad church', the approach is clearly open to theorists focusing on how domestic-level factors affect international-level developments or how the mechanical pressure of anarchy

filters down into domestic policy. Finally, the societal approach is the very reason that a study of history—including differences across historical periods—figures so prominently within the tradition. On all these points, International Society theorists have been or are potentially receptive to the idea of combining the domestic and international levels in the analysis of International Relations.

On the other hand, it is fair to say that International Society theorists have not developed any systematic approach for integrating international and domestic factors. Both theoretically and methodologically, it is unclear exactly how such an integration should be carried out. How exactly do the three traditions—linked with Machiavelli, Grotius, and Kant, respectively—influence international relations? As Buzan (2014: 18) points out, this could happen in one or more of three ways: as (1) ideas in the minds of statesmen, (2) ideas in the minds of political theorists, and (3) as defining the international structure. Whether it is (1), (2), or (3) makes a big difference with respect to how we might integrate the international and domestic level in our analyses. Moreover, even those who opt for the third solution and call for a more structuralist version of the International Society approach have not attempted to combine system-level pressures and domestic-level factors in a systematic way.

Another illustration can be found in the recent work on how secondary institutions both manifest and affect the primary institutions of international society. International organizations (secondary institutions) are designed by states, and hence by statespeople, to achieve certain aims. Over time, these aims might transform the very nature of international society. But though this ‘two-level’ understanding of the evolution of international society (Knudsen and Navari 2019) enables scholars to understand how actors affect structures, little attempt has been made to theorize more specifically how domestic politics affects the establishment of international organizations, a step that is needed to successfully integrate domestic factors into the analysis of changes in international society. Most work within the International Society approach thus slights Waltz’s second or domestic level of analysis. So we are very much left with the image of an approach that can accommodate the integration of different levels but which has not itself done this in any clear and systematic way.

### \* Key points

- The International Society approach is a middle way in classical IR scholarship: it occupies a place between classical realism and classical liberalism and builds that place into a separate and distinctive IR approach. It regards international relations as a ‘society’ of states in which the principal actors are statespeople who are specialized in the art of statecraft.
- A system of states is formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them to make the behaviour of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other.

A society of states exists when a group of states form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another.

- There have been numerous historical state systems and a number of different international societies. Many of these historical cases have been characterized by a tendency towards hegemony, meaning that one state lays down the law for the others. An important strand of work centres on the development of the European international society and its historical expansion into today's global international society.
- IR is a never-ending dialogue between realism, rationalism, and revolutionism. Realism emphasizes anarchy and power politics. Rationalism emphasizes society and international law. Revolutionism emphasizes humanitarianism, human rights, and human justice.
- The main point of international society is the promotion and preservation of international order. The responsibility for sustaining order between states belongs to the great powers.
- International order is based on a number of 'primary institutions' of international relations, including the balance of power, war, and diplomacy. These are more important than 'secondary institutions' such as the League of Nations and the UN. However, changes in secondary institutions can also be seen as heralding—and, according to some scholars, causing—changes in primary institutions.
- International society also involves concerns about justice. Commutative justice is the principal form of international justice. But issues of distributive justice are of increasing importance on the international agenda.
- Pluralist international society may be evolving, at least in some respects, into a solidarist world society.
- There is an important distinction between the two faces of solidarism: state-centric and cosmopolitan. The former, which privileges the role of states in spreading e.g. human rights is much more in line with the pluralism position than the latter.
- Statespeople face difficult dilemmas because of the different kinds of responsibility that they have to consider. There are three distinctive dimensions of responsibility: national, international, and humanitarian.
- An important methodological criticism of the International Society approach emphasizes that its approach to causal analysis has been vague. Others see this 'methodological pluralism' as one of the key strengths of the approach.
- Critics argue that international society is becoming more, some would say far more, than merely a society of states. They point to the rise of human rights, the globalization of the world economy, the growth of environmentalism, and similar developments in international relations.

## ? Questions

- What are the core elements of the International Society approach?
- Is there a more basic structure of international relations that underpins both the system of states and the society of states, as some International Society scholars argue?

- What is the difference between order and justice in world politics? Is Hedley Bull correct in claiming that order comes before justice?
- What is the difference between 'primary' and 'secondary' institutions? Give specific examples from each category. How can secondary institutions contribute to transforming primary institutions?
- Which empirical tendencies do we find in earlier historical state systems? In what way does the European system differ?
- How did a global international society come about? When did this occur?
- Explain the basic differences between pluralist international society and solidarist international society.
- What is the main methodological criticism of the International Society approach? Is the criticism valid?
- Can war be justified in terms of international humanitarian responsibility?
- Some International Society theorists argue that human rights have become of increased importance in world politics since the end of the Cold War. Are they correct? What is the evidence in favour of such a view?
- International Society theorists are sometimes accused of being realists in disguise. Is that accusation warranted?
- Is international society moving beyond a pluralist society of sovereign states and increasingly becoming a solidarist world society in response to globalization, environmentalism, and other processes of transformation?

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# International Political Economy: Marxism, Mercantilism, Liberalism

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## Summary

This chapter is about the relationship between politics and economics, between states and markets in world affairs. Ultimately, International Political Economy (IPE) is about wealth, poverty, and power, about who gets what in the international economic and political system. The most important classical theories in this area are mercantilism, economic liberalism, and neo-Marxism. These are ‘theories’ in the very broad sense of a set of assumptions and values from which the field of IPE can be approached. We present each of these theories in some detail; in Chapter 10 we return to the most important issues of contemporary IPE, and how the classical theories inform today’s study of these issues.



## 6.1 Introduction: What Is IPE?

In some fundamental ways, our lives are about political economy. To survive, we need food, clothes, and many other goods. Most of us obtain these provisions in the marketplace, paying for them with money we have earned. A modern market is based on political rules (if not, it would be a ‘Mafia market’ based on threats, bribes, and force). Political rules and regulations constitute a framework within which the market functions. At the same time, economic strength is an important basis for political power. If economics is about the pursuit of wealth, and politics about the pursuit of power, the two interact in complicated and puzzling ways (Polanyi 1957; Gilpin 1987, 2001; see also Watson 2020). It is this complex interplay in the international context between politics and economics, between states and markets, which is the core of IPE (see Box 6.1). Since today’s world is intensely globalized, especially in terms of economic relations across borders, some observers prefer the label ‘Global Political Economy’ (GPE) instead of IPE (Ravenhill 2020). But even if there is a globalized economy, the academic field continues to be called IPE by most scholars, and we stay with that label.

The theoretical traditions introduced in earlier chapters have issues of war and peace, of conflict and cooperation between states, as their main subject of study. IPE shifts our attention to issues of wealth and poverty, to who gets what in the international system. The present chapter is also different from the previous ones in that it does not focus on a single body of theory or school of thought. Instead, it introduces the three most important classical theoretical traditions within the field of IPE; Chapter 10 discusses the major current issues that dominate IPE. This approach reflects the development of the discipline of IR in which IPE has emerged as a field of study in its own right. Some scholars even argue that IPE is the more comprehensive discipline and that IR should be seen as a subfield of IPE (Cohen 2008: 53). Alternatively, both IR and IPE could be subfields within a broader discipline of International Studies (Strange 1995). Many economists believe that methods and theories from the discipline of economics can be applied in other areas of human affairs, including politics and IR. Many political scientists will argue against this tendency to reduce politics to a branch of economics. This debate is fundamentally about which theories and which research questions are the most important (Lake 2009; Seabrooke and Young 2017; see also Cohen 2008: 82–3; 2019: 29).

### BOX 6.1 Key Concepts: Definitions of IPE

- ‘[T]he reciprocal and dynamic interaction in international relations of the pursuit of wealth and the pursuit of power’ (Gilpin 1975: 43)
- ‘[T]he intersection of the substantive area studied by economics—production and exchange of marketable means of want satisfaction—with the process by which power is exercised that is central to politics’ (Keohane 1984: 21)
- ‘[C]onnections between economics and politics beyond the confines of a single state’ (Cohen 2008: 1)



As we saw in Chapter 2, a core normative argument for the establishment of the academic discipline of IR at the beginning of the twentieth century was that it should help promote a more peaceful world. The focus on war and peace continued during the 1950s and 1960s in the context of the Cold War. For those academics, as well as politicians whose international outlook was shaped by the experiences of two world wars, this was a natural choice of focus. French President Charles de Gaulle, for example, considered economic affairs ‘quartermaster’s stuff’ and ‘low politics’, which could be looked after by lesser minds while statesmen such as himself took care of the ‘high politics’, which concerned the larger issues of war and peace. Both classical realism and neorealism give priority to politics over economics (see Chapter 3).

In the 1950s and 1960s, one could easily get the impression that many IR scholars made the misjudgement of separating economics and politics. For a long time, economics and politics in international relations were seen as almost totally isolated from each other, as qualitatively different activities being studied with qualitatively different approaches. As one scholar pointed out in 1970, international economics and international politics were ‘a case of mutual neglect’ (Strange 1970). But this sharp distinction between politics and economics was increasingly questioned by the early 1970s.

Why the change of attitude? First, the system that politicians had set up to foster economic growth and international exchange after the Second World War—the so-called **Bretton Woods** system—showed signs of crisis. In particular, the United States was in economic difficulties which grew out of its deep involvement in the Vietnam War (1961–73). To halt the drain on US gold reserves, the gold convertibility of the American dollar had to be abandoned. That measure was taken by American President Richard Nixon. In other words, political measures were taken that changed the rules of the game in the economic marketplace (see Box 6.2). More specifically, the US international hegemony that had sustained the Bretton Woods system seemed to be faltering, and this raised the prospect of a deterioration of the rules governing international economic relations. Some of the most important works of IPE addressed this issue. In a book with the telling

### BOX 6.2 Key Developments: The Bretton Woods system

The rules of Bretton Woods . . . provided for a system of fixed exchange rates. Public officials, fresh from what they perceived as a disastrous experience with floating rates in the 1930s, concluded that a fixed exchange rate was the most stable and the most conducive to trade . . . The rules further encouraged an open system, by committing members to the convertibility of their respective currencies into other currencies and to free trade . . .

On August 15, 1971, President Nixon—without consulting the other members of the international monetary system and, indeed, without consulting his own State Department—announced his new economic policy: henceforth, the dollar would no longer be convertible into gold, and the United States would impose a 10 per cent surcharge on dutiable imports. August 15, 1971, marked the end of the Bretton Woods period.

**Spero (1985: 37, 54)**

title *After Hegemony*, Robert Keohane (1984) asked ‘can cooperation take place without hegemony and, if so, how?’ In another influential book, Robert Gilpin (1987) asked why the Bretton Woods system had broken down and become replaced by something less liberal. In Chapter 10, we return to the answers they gave. The oil crisis from 1973 onwards contributed to a sense of lost innocence. In times of economic crisis, it usually becomes clearer that politics and economics hang together.

Second, decolonization had created a new group of politically weak and economically poor states in the international system. Most newly independent countries were far from satisfied with their subordinate position in the international economic system. At UN meetings during the 1970s, they called for a ‘New International Economic Order’; i.e., political proposals designed to improve the economic position of developing countries—also sometimes referred to as the Global South—in the international system. Although far less important than the Bretton Woods foreign-exchange crisis, these proposals did reveal how the economic position of countries in the international order is closely connected to political measures. The 2008 financial crisis and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic again demonstrate the close connections between political measures and economic activity (Gavris 2019; Goolsbee 2020). In both cases, political action was needed to salvage economic activity; even those sceptical of political intervention in the marketplace turn to state power when crises of this magnitude erupt.

This shift can be placed in historical perspective. As John M. Hobson (2013) has argued, it is really the period from the Second World War to the late 1960s that makes up the historical exception, both on the ground and within academia. This was a period when the Cold War and the relatively low level of international economic integration made it meaningful to maintain a pure focus on ‘IR-as-high-politics’ (2013: 1030). The advent of modern IPE in the 1970s did not constitute a ‘new turn’ but rather a ‘return to normalcy’ (2013: 1030). Just as IR scholars had focused on the interactions between politics and economics before the Second World War, they would do so again after the breakdown of Bretton Woods and the advent of what Keohane and Nye (1977) termed ‘complex interdependence’, that is, an intensification of international economic ties of mutual exchange and mutual dependence. Hobson (2013: 1032) therefore argues that the 1970s do not mark the birth of IPE but rather its *institutionalization*. In this chapter, we will look at the older—pre-war—tradition that modern IPE draws on but we will also show how these classical theories or approaches to IPE have been redeveloped since the 1970s.

In summary, there is a complex relationship between politics and economics, between states and markets that IR scholars ignore at their peril. That relationship is the subject of IPE, which has again risen to prominence since the 1970s. Different theoretical ways of approaching the connection between politics and economics exist and remain influential. From the possible theories to choose from (Watson 2020; Balaam and Dillman 2018), we have selected three classical theories which most scholars see as the main theories of IPE: mercantilism, economic liberalism, and Marxism. These are ‘theories’ in the very broad sense of a set of assumptions and values from which the field of IPE can be approached. This division of the field resonates with Robert Gilpin’s (1987) seminal distinction between realism, liberalism, and Marxism. As will be apparent, the outlook

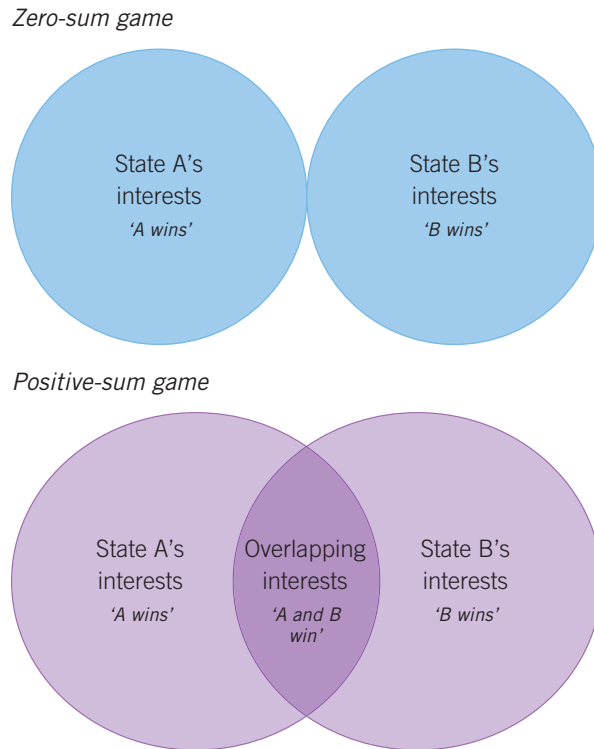
of mercantilism thus has much in common with realism, while economic liberalism is an addition to liberal theory. These two theories represent views on IPE that are basically realist and liberal. Marxism has its own original theoretical position and we will spend a little more time on that because the Marxist approach has not been previously presented. There are many additional IPE theories to choose from today; for example, both constructivist and post-positivist scholars have made contributions to the field, as we shall see in Chapter 10. However, the three theories examined here can be considered the foundational IPE theories and they continue to be of major importance for several of IPE's core questions and core concepts.

## 6.2 Mercantilism

We begin with mercantilism because this theory is intimately connected to the establishment of the modern, sovereign state during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Mercantilism was the world-view of political elites who were at the forefront of building the modern state. They took the approach that economic activity is and should be subordinated to the primary goal of building a strong state. In other words, economics is a tool of politics, a basis for political power. That is a defining feature of mercantilist thinking. Mercantilists see the international economy as an arena of conflict between opposing national interests, rather than an area of cooperation and mutual gain. In brief, economic competition between states is a 'zero-sum game' where one state's gain is another state's loss (see Figure 6.1). States have to be worried about relative economic gain, because the material wealth accumulated by one state can serve as a basis for military-political power which can be used against other states. There is a close affinity between this mercantilist way of thinking and neorealist thought about competition between states in an anarchic realm.

Economic rivalry between states can take two different forms (Gilpin 1987: 32). The first is called defensive or 'benign' mercantilism: states look after their national economic interest because that is an important ingredient of their national security; such policies need not have overly negative effects on other states. The other form, however, is aggressive or 'malevolent' mercantilism. Here, states attempt to exploit the international economy through expansionary policies; for example, the imperialism of European colonial powers in Asia and Africa. Mercantilists thus see economic strength and military-political power as complementary, not competing goals, in a positive feedback loop. The pursuit of economic strength supports the development of the state's military and political power; and military-political power enhances and strengthens the state's economic power.

This contrasts sharply with the liberal view introduced in Chapter 4. Liberals posit a radically different choice—the pursuit of economic prosperity through free trade and open economic exchange versus the pursuit of power by the means of military force and territorial expansion. In other words, states can choose the road of economic development and trade and thus become 'trading states', as did West Germany and Japan after the Second World War. Or they can choose the road of military force and territorial expansion and thus base their prominence on military power, as did the communist

**FIGURE 6.1** Zero-sum versus positive-sum game

Soviet Union. Mercantilists reject that liberal view. More national wealth and more military–political power are complementary strategies that serve the same fundamental end: a stronger, more powerful state. A choice between the two appears only in specific situations; one example is the limits that Western powers put on economic exchange with the Eastern Bloc [the communist countries of Eastern Europe] during the Cold War. Here, the West made an economic sacrifice for reasons of military security. Mercantilists see that as an extraordinary situation. Normally, wealth and power can be pursued simultaneously, in mutual support.

Mercantilists maintain that the economy should be subordinate to the primary goal of increasing state power: politics must have primacy over economics. But the content of the concrete policies recommended to serve that goal has changed over time. Sixteenth-century mercantilists noted how Spain benefitted from the supply of gold and silver bullion from the Americas; that led them to call for the acquisition of bullion as the main road to national wealth. However, when the Netherlands emerged as the leading country in Europe, not through the acquisition of bullion, but mainly because of its vast overseas trading empire, mercantilists started to emphasize trade and the creation of the largest possible trade surplus as the road to national prosperity. Ever since Britain obtained a leading role in world politics through industrialization, mercantilists have underlined the need for countries to industrialize as the best way to obtain national

**BOX 6.3** Key Arguments: Basic mercantilist assumptions

Anglo-American *theory* instructs Westerners that economics is by nature a ‘positive sum game’ from which all can emerge as winners. Asian *history* instructs many Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, and others that economic competition is a form of war in which some win and others lose. To be strong is much better than to be weak; to give orders is better than to take them. By this logic, the way to be strong, to give orders, to have independence and control, is to keep in mind the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This perspective comes naturally to Koreans (when thinking about Japan), or Canadians (when thinking about the United States), or Britons (when thinking, even today, about Germany), or to Chinese or Japanese (when thinking about what the Europeans did to their nations).

**Fallows (1994: 231)**

power (List 1966). Mercantilism has been particularly popular in countries that lagged behind Britain in industrial development; they felt an urgent need to catch up industrially in order to compete with Britain (see Box 6.3). That catching-up could not be left to market forces; it called for political measures to protect and develop local industry.

Mercantilism has been advocated by some eminent politicians and economists. Alexander Hamilton, one of the founding fathers of the United States, was a strong proponent of mercantilism in the form of protectionist policies aimed at promoting domestic industry in the United States. Another eloquent spokesman for mercantilism was Friedrich List, a German economist. In the 1840s he developed a theory of ‘productive power’, which stressed that the ability to produce is more important than the result of producing. In other words, the prosperity of a state depends not primarily on its store of wealth, but on the extent to which it has developed its ‘powers of production’:

A nation capable of developing a manufacturing power, if it makes use of the system of protection, thus acts quite in the same spirit as the landed proprietor did who by the sacrifice of some material wealth allowed some of his children to learn a production trade.

**(List 1966: 145)**

Recent mercantilists focus on the successful ‘developmental’ states in East Asia: Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China. They emphasize that economic success has always been accompanied by a strong, commanding role for the state in promoting economic development. For example, the Japanese state has played a very comprehensive role in the economic development of that country. The state has singled out strategic industries, protected them from outside competition, and supported their development even by regulating the competition between firms (Johnson 1982).

There is also a recent ‘geo-economic’ body of theory, which can be seen as an attempt to update the mercantilist perspective to the world of great powers armed with nuclear weapons. The basic insight here is that the threat of ‘mutual assured destruction’ (MAD) from nuclear weapons has changed the nature of interstate competition. Where competition used to concern geopolitics, and security in particular, it now increasingly

**TABLE 6.1** Mercantilism summarized

Relationship between economics and politics:	Politics decisive
Main actors/units of analysis:	States
The nature of economic relations:	Conflictual, a zero-sum game
Economic goals:	State power

concerns economics; if countries go into nuclear war, they would risk self-destruction. Great power war is no longer a possible tool of foreign policy, and the dynamics of state competition therefore increasingly take place in the economic arena (Luttwak 1990; see also Grieco et al. 2015: 420).

In summary, mercantilism sees the economy as subordinate to politics and, particularly, to government. Economic activity is seen in the larger context of increasing state power. The organization that is responsible for defending and advancing the national interest, namely the state, rules over private economic interests. Wealth and power are complementary, not competing goals. Economic dependence on other states should be avoided as far as possible. When economic and security interests clash, security interests have priority (see Table 6.1).

### 6.3 Economic Liberalism

Economic liberalism emerged as a critique of the comprehensive political control and regulation of the economic affairs that dominated European state-building in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; i.e., mercantilism. Economic liberals reject theories and policies that subordinate economics to politics. They hold that ‘the creation of the modern world is a consequence of factors internal to the market’ (Gilpin 1987: 67). Adam Smith (1723–90), the father of economic liberalism, believed that markets tend to expand spontaneously for the satisfaction of human needs—provided that governments do not interfere unduly. He builds on the body of classical liberal ideas summarized in Chapter 4. These core ideas include the rational individual actor, a belief in progress, and an assumption of mutual gain from free exchange. But Smith also adds some elements of his own to liberal thinking, including the key notion that the economic marketplace is the main source of progress, cooperation, and prosperity. Political interference and state regulation, by contrast, are uneconomical, retrogressive, and may lead to conflict.

Liberal economics has been called ‘a doctrine and a set of principles for organizing and managing economic growth, and individual welfare’ (Gilpin 1987: 27). It is based on the notion that if left to itself, the market economy will operate spontaneously according to its own mechanisms or ‘laws’. These laws are considered to be inherent in the process of economic production and exchange. One example is the ‘law of comparative advantage’ formulated by David Ricardo (1772–1823). He argued that free trade—i.e., commercial activities that are carried on independently of national borders—will bring benefits to all participants because free trade makes specialization possible and specialization

**BOX 6.4** Key Quotes: A liberal view

Under a system of perfectly free commerce, each country naturally devotes its capital and labour to such employments as are most beneficial to each. The pursuit of individual advantage is admirably connected with the universal good of the whole. By stimulating industry, by rewarding ingenuity, and by using most efficaciously the peculiar powers bestowed by nature, it distributes labour most effectively and most economically: while, by increasing the general mass of productions, it diffuses general benefit and binds together, by one common tie of interest and intercourse, the universal society of nations throughout the civilized world.

**Ricardo (1973: 81)**

increases efficiency and thus productivity (Watson 2017). Paul Samuelson summarized the argument as follows:

Whether or not one of two regions is absolutely more efficient in the production of every good than is the other, if each specializes in the product in which it has a comparative advantage (greatest relative efficiency), trade will be mutually profitable to both regions.

**(Samuelson 1967: 651)**

In a world economy based on free trade, all countries will benefit through specialization and global wealth will increase (see Box 6.4).

Economic liberals thus reject the mercantilist view that the state is the central actor and focus when it comes to economic affairs. The central actor is the individual as a consumer and a producer. The marketplace is the open arena where individuals come together to exchange goods and services. Individuals are rational in pursuing their own economic interests, and when they apply that rationality in the marketplace, all participants gain. Economic exchange via the market is thus a positive-sum game: everybody gains more than they put in because of increased efficiency (see Figure 6.1). Individuals and companies would not be active in the marketplace unless it were to their benefit. Liberal economists find that this view of individuals as rational and self-seeking (wanting to make themselves better off) can be used as a starting point for understanding not only market economics but also politics. That particular perspective goes under the name of rational choice theory. Liberals thus reject the mercantilist zero-sum view where one state's economic gain is necessarily another state's economic loss. The road to human prosperity goes through the unfettered expansion of the free market economy, capitalism, not only in each country but also across international boundaries (see Table 6.2 for a summary of liberalism).

There is a recurring debate among economic liberals, however, about the extent to which political interference by governments may be necessary. Early economic liberals called for *laissez-faire*; i.e., for the freedom of the market from all kinds of political restriction and regulation. Yet, even the early economic liberals were aware of the need for a politically constructed legal framework as a basis for the market (Stahl

TABLE 6.2 Liberalism summarized

Relationship between economics and politics:	Economics autonomous
Main actors/units of analysis:	Individuals and private firms
The nature of economic relations:	Cooperative, a positive-sum game
Economic goals:	Maximum individual and social well-being

2019). Laissez-faire does not mean the absence of any political regulation whatsoever; it means that the state only sets up those minimal underpinnings that are necessary for the market to function properly. This is the classical version of economic liberalism. At the present time this view is also put forward under labels such as ‘conservatism’ or ‘neoliberalism’; the content, however, is basically the same. The ‘conservative/neo-liberal’ economic policies of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and of Ronald Reagan in the United States in the 1980s were both influenced by classical laissez-faire doctrines.

Economic liberals have from early on been aware that in some cases the market may not work according to expectations of efficiency and mutual gain; such cases are usually called instances of ‘market failure’. Political regulation may be necessary to correct or avoid market failures. Some economic liberals thus argue for a larger degree of state interference in the market. John Stuart Mill was in many ways a laissez-faire economic liberal, but he was also critical of the extreme inequalities of income, wealth, and power that he observed in nineteenth-century Britain (Stahl 2019). That made him call for limited state action in some areas, including education and relief for the poor. In the 1930s, John Maynard Keynes, the leading economist of the early twentieth century, went one step further. According to Keynes, the market economy is a great benefit to people, but it also entails potential evils of ‘risk, uncertainty and ignorance’. That situation could be remedied through improved political management of the market. Keynes thus argued in favour of a market which was ‘wisely managed’ by the state (Keynes 1963: 321).

This positive view of the state amounted to a major shift in liberal economic doctrine. Keynesian ideas paved the way for a significantly reformed liberal theory: one which was still based on a market economy, but with a considerable degree of state interference and direction. The Keynesian view was popular in Europe in the decades following the Second World War. In the 1980s, however, the pendulum swung back towards laissez-faire liberalism. One major reason for this renewed liberal faith in the unfettered market is the belief that economic globalization will bring prosperity to all. We shall return to that issue in Chapter 10.

In summary, economic liberals argue that the market economy is an autonomous sphere of society which operates according to its own economic laws. Over time, the modern part of the economy tends to crowd out more backward sectors, which increases efficiency and hence wealth (Gilpin 1987: 67). Economic exchange is a positive-sum game and the market will tend to maximize benefits for the rational, self-seeking individuals,



the households, and the companies that participate in market exchange. The economy is a sphere of cooperation for mutual benefit among states as well as among individuals. The international economy should thus be based on free trade. Classical liberal economists view the role of the state as that of leaving the market alone, including international markets as well as national markets: *laissez-faire*. However, some twentieth- and twenty-first-century economic liberals favour increased state involvement in the marketplace.

## 6.4 Marxism

The political economy of the nineteenth-century German philosopher and economist Karl Marx represents in many ways a fundamental critique of economic liberalism. We saw above that economic liberals view the economy as a positive-sum game with benefits for all. Marx rejected that view. Instead, he saw the economy as a site of human exploitation and class inequality. Marx thus takes the zero-sum argument of mercantilism but applies it to relations of classes instead of relations of states. Marxists agree with mercantilists that politics and economics are closely intertwined; both reject the liberal view of an economic sphere operating under its own laws. But where mercantilists see economics as a tool of politics, Marxists put economics first and politics second. For Marxists, the capitalist economy is based on two antagonistic social classes: one class, the bourgeoisie, owns the means of production; the other class, the proletariat, owns only its labour power which it must sell to the bourgeoisie. But labour puts in more work than it gets back in pay; there is a surplus value appropriated by the bourgeoisie. That is capitalist profit and it is derived from labour exploitation.

Even if a capitalist economy controlled by the bourgeoisie is exploitative of labour, Marx did not see the growth of capitalism as a negative or retrogressive event. On the contrary, capitalism means progress for Marx in two ways: first, capitalism destroys previous relations of production, such as feudalism, which were even more exploitative, with peasants subsisting under slave-like conditions. Capitalism is a step forward in the sense that workers are free to sell their labour power and seek out the best possible pay. Second, and most important for Marx, capitalism paves the way for a socialist revolution where the means of production will be placed under social control for the benefit of the proletariat who are the vast majority.

The Marxist view is materialist: it is based on the claim that the core activity in any society concerns the way in which human beings produce their means of existence. Economic production is the basis for all other human activities, including politics. The economic basis consists, on the one hand, of the forces of production; i.e., the technical level of economic activity (e.g., industrial machinery versus artisan handicraft). On the other hand, it consists of the relations of production; i.e., the system of social ownership which determines actual control over the productive forces (e.g., private ownership versus collective ownership). Taken together, the forces of production and relations of production form a specific mode of production, for example, capitalism, which is based on industrial machinery and private ownership (see Box 6.5). The bourgeoisie, which dominates the capitalist economy through control of the means of production, will also

**BOX 6.5** Key Quotes: A Marxist view

Modern industry has converted the little workshop of patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is.

**Marx and Engels (1955 [1848]: 17)**

tend to dominate in the political sphere because, according to Marxists, economics is the basis of politics.

This brings us to the Marxist framework for the study of IPE. Marx had little to say about international affairs, including issues of international political economy. But his writings include a few scattered remarks about the importance of access to raw materials abroad and the possibility that advanced countries can export for profit. A theory of IPE has been built on the basis of these remarks and the Marxist theory of domestic politics (Panitch and Gindin 2013; Cohen 2019: 38; Watson 2020). First, states are not autonomous; they are driven by ruling-class interests, and capitalist states are primarily driven by the interests of their respective bourgeoisies. This means that struggles between states, including wars, should be seen in the economic context of competition between capitalist classes of different states. For Marxists, class conflict is more fundamental than conflict between states. Second, as an economic system, capitalism is expansive: there is a never-ending search for new markets and more profit. Because classes cut across state borders, class conflict is not confined to states; instead, it expands around the world in the wake of capitalism. Such expansion first took the form of imperialism and colonization, but it continued after the colonies had been granted independence. It now takes the form of economic globalization led by giant transnational corporations. The history of IPE can thus be seen by Marxists as the history of capitalist expansion across the globe.

The early twentieth century saw the emergence of a number of analyses of imperialism, with focus on the global expansion and dominance of capitalism. They took the basic analysis by Marx and brought it to bear on the mechanisms and consequences of international capitalist development. In that sense, they are early studies of globalization; Rudolf Hilferding, Rosa Luxemburg, Nikolaj Bukharin, and Vladimir Lenin are among the most important contributors (Kemp 1967; Milios and Sotiropoulos 2009).

Lenin, the Communist leader of the Russian Revolution of 1917, argued that the process of capitalist expansion must always be unequal or uneven, between countries, industries, and firms. For example, Britain was ahead of Germany for most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Consequently, Britain had secured for itself a vast

**BOX 6.6** Key Quotes: Lenin and the law of uneven development

There can be no other conceivable basis under capitalism for the division of spheres of influence . . . than a calculation of the strength of the participants in the division, their general economic, financial, military strength, etc. And the strength of these participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for under capitalism the development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries cannot be even.

**Lenin (1999 [1917]: 116)**

colonial empire whereas Germany had very little. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, Germany was catching up economically and Britain was declining. Therefore, Lenin noted, Germany wanted a redivision of international spheres of influence, according to the new relative strength of the countries. That demand led to war between Germany and Britain. Such disparities and conflicts will always develop under capitalist conditions, argued Lenin. That is the 'law of uneven development' (see Box 6.6).

The notion of uneven development points to the need for an historical analysis of capitalist expansion. Events must always be analysed in their specific historical context. For example, there was high economic interdependence between countries around the time of the First World War; there is also high economic interdependence between many countries today. But we need to look at the precise nature of that interdependence in its historical context in order to be able to understand the processes taking place and their significance for international relations; interdependence around the First World War was often arm's-length import/export relations between independent companies. Today, it is frequently integrated circuits of production between subsidiaries of the same transnational company; a Ford car, for example, contains parts produced in many different countries. Such global networks of production make for a different and closer type of economic integration than traditional imports and exports between separate companies.

The difference between Marxist and realist analysis should be brought to attention. Both views agree on the perennial competition and conflict between states. But realists explain this by pointing to the existence of independent states in a condition of anarchy. Therefore, the struggle between states has been taking place for several millennia, ever since the emergence of states (i.e., independent political units) on the world stage. Marxists reject that view as abstract and unhistorical. It is abstract because there is no concrete specification of the social forces that actually sustain conflict between states. These social forces, so the Marxists maintain, are the ruling classes of capitalists (and their allies); they ultimately control and determine what 'their' states do. When states are rivals and sometimes come into conflict, it is because they pursue the economic and political interests for international dominance and control sought after by the ruling classes (see Box 6.7).

The realist view is also unhistorical, according to Marxists. This is because realists see history as always repeating itself; it is 'the same things over and over again' (Layne 1994); states competing in anarchy. Marxists argue that conflict between states varies

**BOX 6.7** Key Arguments: A neo-Marxist view

It is widely believed that the United States and other developed capitalist countries contribute more capital to the underdeveloped countries than they receive from them. Nonetheless, all available statistics . . . show precisely the opposite . . . For the seven largest Latin American countries . . . the United States Department of Commerce's conservatively calculated figures for the years 1950 to 1961 indicate \$2,962 million of investment flows on private accounts out of the United States and remittances of profits and interest of \$6,875 million; adding American public loans and their Latin American servicing between the same years still leaves a conservatively calculated net capital outflow of \$2,081 million to the United States.

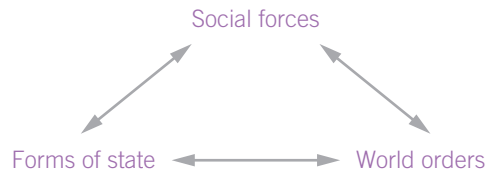
**Frank (1971: 237–8)**

substantially across history. Conflict between capitalist states—and ultimately between capitalist ruling classes—is, of course, connected to the capitalist historical era. Consequently, competition and conflict of earlier historical phases require a different explanation, tying it in with the contest between the social forces of those periods of feudalism and antiquity. This is the Marxist principle of historical specification.

Realists argue that the Marxist view of the state is reductionist; that is, it reduces the state to a simple tool in the hands of the ruling classes, with no will of its own. States are strong actors in their own right. They embody powerful institutions, they control the means of violence (army, police), and they have substantial economic resources. It is simply wrong to view the state as a mere instrument or handmaiden for others. More recent Marxist analysis has conceded this point. The state has some autonomy from the ruling classes, but it is a *relative* autonomy; the basic function of the capitalist state remains the safeguarding of the capitalist system. Yet, within this general framework, the state should not be reduced to a simple tool of others (Carnoy 1984: Ch. 4; Maher and Aquanno 2018).

Robert Cox is a prominent neo-Marxist analyst of world politics and political economy (Cox 1996; Budd 2013; Brincat 2016). Cox begins with the concept of historical structures, defined as 'a particular configuration of forces' (Cox 1996: 97). These historical structures are made up of three categories of forces that interact: material capabilities, ideas, and institutions. Note how Cox moves away from the traditional Marxist emphasis on materialism through the inclusion of ideas and institutions. In the next step, historical structures are identified at three different levels; they are labelled 'social forces', 'forms of state', and 'world orders', as outlined in Figure 6.2.

The term 'social forces' is shorthand for the process of capitalist production. An analysis of this aspect will inform us about the present state of development of the capitalist economy on a global scale. 'Forms of state' point to the ways in which states change in the interplay with the social forces of capitalist development. The term 'world orders' refers to the current organization of international relations, including relations between major states and groups of states, the status of international law, and international institutions.

**FIGURE 6.2** Cox's analytical framework

In sum, Cox theorizes a complex interplay between politics and economics, specified as the interaction between social forces, forms of state, and world orders. The task for the analyst is to find out how these relationships play out in the current phase of human history. It is not possible to present Cox's analysis of these matters fully here, but the gist of his argument is as follows (Cox 1992; Sinclair 2016). As regards the social forces of capitalism, they are currently involved in an intense process of economic globalization, meaning an internationalizing of production as well as migration movements from South to North. Globalization has been driven by market forces, but Cox foresees that new social movements critical of globalization will grow increasingly strong and this will open a new phase of struggle between social forces concerning the control and regulation of economic globalization.

As regards forms of state, there is variation between states because they link into the global political economy in different ways. States compete for advantage, but they do it on the premise that integration in the global economy is unavoidable. The dominant forces in capitalist states 'concur in giving priority to competitiveness in the global economy and in precluding interventions by whatever authority that are not consistent with this aim' (Cox 2002: 34). Non-territorial power is becoming more important for states; they compete for markets and economic opportunities across the globe. Transnational corporations and civil society organizations operating across borders (i.e., NGOs) are of increasing importance.

Finally, as regards world order, the long-term tendency will be for replacement of the global US dominance. Several scenarios are possible; one is an international order of 'conflicting power centres' (Cox 1996: 114) structured around leading states or groups of states, such as the EU in Europe and China and Japan in East Asia (see Chapter 10). Another possibility is a 'post-hegemonic order' (Cox 1992: 142) where states agree on rules and norms of peaceful cooperation for mutual benefit and a common framework for the resolution of possible conflicts. Robert Cox's framework is one example of a neo-Marxist IPE analysis; in Chapter 10 we shall return to some of the issues he takes up.

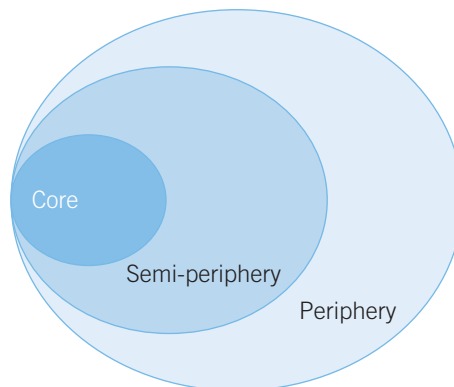
Another major neo-Marxist analysis comes from Immanuel Wallerstein (1974; 1979; 1983; 2004; 2013). His starting point is the concept of **world system analysis**. World systems need not physically include the whole world; they are unified areas characterized by particular economic and political structures. The concept thus ties economics and politics together: a world system is characterized by a certain economic and a certain political structure with the one depending on the other. In human history, there have been two basic varieties of world systems: 'world empires' and 'world economies'. In world empires, such as the Roman Empire, political and economic control is

concentrated in a unified centre. World economies, in contrast, are tied together economically in a single division of labour; but politically, authority is decentralized, residing in multiple polities, in a system of states. Wallerstein's key focus is the analysis of the modern world economy, characterized by capitalism.

The capitalist world economy was established in 'the long sixteenth century' (1450–1640). This happened in a somewhat accidental way at first. According to Wallerstein, China was in fact best positioned for a breakthrough to modern capitalism, but for a number of reasons, north-west Europe was able to diversify its agriculture and to connect it with industrial advance in textiles and shipping (Mahoney 2000: 519–21). That put Europe in the driving seat of the global capitalist system. This system was based on an international division of labour that covered Europe first, but soon extended to the Western hemisphere and later also to other parts of the world because the European capitalist areas required territorial expansion. Within this division of labour, a process of specialization took place. Wallerstein drew inspiration from Lenin's distinction between a developed core and an undeveloped periphery, exploited via capitalist imperialism (see Figure 6.3). The core areas, for instance, Western European states and North America, contain the advanced and complex economic activities (mass-market industries and sophisticated agriculture). Furthermore, these activities are controlled by an indigenous bourgeoisie. Peripheral areas, for instance, in Africa south of the Sahara, are at the bottom of the hierarchy; they produce staple goods such as grain, wood, sugar, and so on. They often employ slavery or coerced labour; what little industrial activity exists is mostly under the external control of capitalists from core countries. Semi-peripheral areas, for instance, some Latin American countries, are economically mixed; they are a middle layer between the upper stratum of core countries and the lower stratum of peripheral countries.

Wallerstein presents a functionalist explanation where the needs of capitalism constantly reproduce the world system. A basic mechanism of this explanation—and hence of the capitalist world economy—is unequal exchange. Economic surplus is transferred from the periphery to the core. Surplus is appropriated from low-wage, low-profit producers in the periphery to high-wage, high-profit producers in the core. This transfer is further accentuated by the emergence of strong state machineries in the core and

**FIGURE 6.3** Wallerstein's World System Analysis



weak state machineries in the periphery. Strong states can enforce unequal exchange on weak ones. Thus capitalism ‘involves not only appropriation of surplus value by an owner from a laborer, but an appropriation of surplus of the whole world-economy by core areas. And this was as true in the stage of agricultural capitalism as it is in the stage of industrial capitalism’ (Wallerstein 1979: 18). Wallerstein—and other neo-Marxists, such as Andre Gunder Frank—here break with classical Marxism. Marx and even Lenin had argued that capitalism develops the periphery by breaking down prior modes of production such as feudalism. The claim of world system theory is that capitalism retards development. In Gunder Frank’s famous term, in the periphery, capitalism creates not ‘development’ and not even ‘undevelopment’ but ‘underdevelopment’ (Gilpin 1987: 68). As Cohen (2019: 40) summarizes this position: ‘Neocolonialism was expected to block, not promote, the development of the poor’ (see Box 6.7).

The argument is that the capitalist exploitation of workers within societies is transferred to the international system where developed countries in the core exploit countries in the periphery via the international equivalent of capitalist relations, namely free trade. In this process of unequal exchange, tensions are created in the system. The semi-periphery has an important function in this regard. It provides an element of political stability, because the core countries are not facing unified opposition; the semi-periphery acts as a buffer or shock absorber by splitting the have-nots into two camps. At the same time, the world economy is not entirely static; any single area of the system may change place from periphery to semi-periphery, from semi-periphery to core, and vice versa. Furthermore, the types of commodities involved in core and peripheral economic activities respectively are subject to dynamic change. Technological advance means that the concrete content of what is ‘advanced economic activity’ always changes. At one point it was textiles; in a later phase it was industrial machinery; today, it is information- and biotechnology together with financial and other services. But Wallerstein emphasizes that the capitalist system as such does not change: it remains a hierarchy of core, semi-periphery, and periphery, characterized by unequal exchange (Chase-Dunn and Hall 2018).

Wallerstein sees the end of the Cold War and the destruction of the Soviet Bloc as a consequence of the development of the capitalist world economy. However, the long-term prospect is the demise of the capitalist system, because the contradictions of that system are now unleashed on a world scale. Success, not failure, is the real threat to global capitalism; when the possibilities for expansion are used up, the never-ending quest for more profit will lead to new crises in the world capitalist economy which sooner or later spell its transformation.

There are some similarities between Wallerstein’s world systems analysis of capitalism and Waltz’s neorealist analysis of the international system (see Chapter 3). Both focus on the system rather than on single units or countries; what happens to countries very much depends on their position in the system. Both see the system as a hierarchy with strong states in the top and weak states in the bottom. But there are also important differences between the two theories: Waltz’s focus is on relative political-military power in a condition of anarchy; Wallerstein’s focus is first and foremost economic power and capability which is then connected with political power. Wallerstein analyses the historical development of capitalism from the sixteenth century onwards,



putting economics first and politics second. Waltz analyses the international balance of power in the twentieth century, putting power politics first and economics second. This is also revealed by the theoretical traditions that Waltz and Wallerstein build on. Waltz's theory is indebted to the nineteenth-century German notion of the primacy of foreign policy (*Das Primat der Aussenpolitik*), whereas the Marxist position emphasizes the primacy of the national economy (Hintze 1975 [1906]; Waltz 1959 [1954]: 7, 124; see Kaspersen and Strandsbjerg 2017). We encourage you to speculate about the advantages and drawbacks of each theory.

Justin Rosenberg (2016) has attempted to update Marxist thinking in relation to IPE and to use it to analyse current events. He draws on Leon Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development. Trotsky developed the theory in an attempt to explain the Russian Revolution of 1917, an event that almost no one had foreseen. Marx had expected that capitalism would eventually embrace all countries in the world. The less developed areas could look to the industrially advanced countries and see 'an image of their own future' (Marx 1970: 8–9). Trotsky rejected that claim; capitalism would surely spread, but it would happen in a way that reflected the particular national and international conditions prevailing in each country at a given time (Trotsky 1976: 583). According to Trotsky it is necessary to understand this 'uneven and combined' development in order to make sense of the Russian Revolution.

Rosenberg argues that the theory of uneven and combined development applies to all phases of capitalist expansion. In a recent article with Chris Boyle, he uses it to explain two much discussed 2016 events: the vote for Brexit in the United Kingdom, and the election of Donald Trump in the US (Rosenberg and Boyle 2019). The first part of the explanation is uneven development: in the advanced Western countries, a long period of economic boom gave way to a crisis by the 1970s. This paved the way for neoliberal deregulation and intensified globalization: large sectors of production and services moved to low-wage countries. It happened at a time when the Maoist closed model of accumulation was in crisis. Under Mao, China had focused on economic development in isolation from the rest of the world. The Deng Xiaoping reforms of the late 1970s and onwards embraced a market economy and opened China to the world market. An enormous pool of cheap labour was now accessible for the advanced countries. This enabled new growth but also massive job loss and extremely high levels of inequality in the advanced countries. This was the background which turned the British 2016 referendum and the US 2016 presidential election into 'vehicles of an inchoate but widespread anti-establishment backlash' (Rosenberg and Boyle 2019: 52). Large sections of voters whose jobs and wages were under pressure from cheap imports voted against globalization and open borders. Rosenberg and Boyle argue that uneven and combined development played a crucial role in producing these outcomes.

It is clear that Wallerstein's, Cox's and Rosenberg's contributions add a number of nuances to Marxist analysis. What is the main thrust of the Marxist approach as compared with liberalism and mercantilism? This basic Marxist view can be summarized as follows: the economy is a site of exploitation and inequality between social classes. Politics is to a large extent determined by the socioeconomic context. The dominant economic class is also dominant politically. That means that in capitalist economies the



TABLE 6.3 Marxism summarized

Relationship between economics and politics:	Economics decisive
Main actors/units of analysis:	Classes
The nature of economic relations:	Conflictual, zero-sum
Economic goals:	Class interests

bourgeoisie will be the ruling class. Global capitalist development is uneven and bound to produce crises and contradictions, between both states and social classes (see Table 6.3). Marxist IPE thus concerns the history of global capitalist expansion, the struggles between classes and states to which it has given rise around the world, and how a revolutionary transformation of that world might come about.

6.5 Conclusion

Politics and economics are entangled in complex ways, and this has consequences for who gets what—the pursuit of power and of wealth—in the international system. In this chapter, we have seen that the field of IPE revolves around this observation. We have not given full coverage of all theories and subjects of IPE in context of one chapter; that would require a separate book (see, for example, Cohen 2008; 2019; Hulsemeyer 2010; O’Brien and Williams 2013; Underhill 2015; Ravenhill 2020). But we have introduced you to the three classical IPE perspectives: Marxism, mercantilism, and liberalism. Table 6.4 summarizes these three schools of thought. In Chapter 10, we shall introduce some of the major questions which IPE scholars are wrestling with in order to convey an impression of the kind of issues that are currently being discussed in IPE. In that connection, we also discuss how IPE theories have fared with respect to integrating international and domestic factors into their explanatory frameworks.

TABLE 6.4 Three theories of IPE

	MERCANTILISM	ECONOMIC LIBERALISM	MARXISM
Relationship between economics and politics:	Politics decisive	Economics autonomous	Economics decisive
Main actors/units of analysis:	States	Individuals	Classes
The nature of economic relations:	Conflictual, zero-sum game	Cooperative, positive-sum game	Conflictual, zero-sum game
Economic goals:	State power	Maximum individual and social well-being	Class interests

## \* Key points

- The relationship between politics and economics, between states and markets, is the subject matter of International Political Economy (IPE). There are three main theories of IPE: mercantilism, economic liberalism, and Marxism.
- Mercantilism posits the economy as subordinate to politics. Economic activity is seen in the larger context of increasing state power: the national interest rules over the marketplace. Wealth and power are complementary, not competing, goals; but excessive economic dependence on other states should be avoided. When economic and security interests clash, security interests have priority.
- Economic liberals argue that the market economy is an autonomous sphere of society, operating according to its own economic laws. Economic exchange is a positive-sum game and the market will tend to maximize benefits for individuals, households, and companies. The economy is a sphere of cooperation for mutual benefit, among states as well as among individuals.
- In the Marxist approach, the economy is a site of exploitation and inequality between social classes, especially the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Politics is to a large extent determined by the socioeconomic context. The dominant economic class is also dominant politically. IPE concerns the history of global capitalist expansion and the struggles between classes and states to which it has given rise. Capitalist development is uneven, retards development in the periphery, and is bound to produce new crises and contradictions, between both states and social classes. Robert Cox, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Justin Rosenberg represent different attempts to further develop Marxist IPE.

## ? Questions

- What is IPE and why is it important?
- Give the core arguments made by the three main theories of IPE: mercantilism, economic liberalism, and Marxism. Which theory, if any, is the best one? Why?
- Politics is in control of economics, say mercantilists. Economics is the basis for everything else, including politics, say Marxists. How should we settle this dispute?
- Economic liberals argue that economic exchange is a positive-sum game. In the Marxist approach the economy is a site of exploitation and inequality. Who is correct?
- Do security interests always have priority over economic matters, as mercantilists claim?
- Marx claimed that capitalism promotes development in the periphery; neo-Marxists claim that it blocks development. Which claims stand up to empirical scrutiny in the twenty-first century?
- Compare Waltz and Wallerstein. Who has the better theory?
- In terms of practical politics, do states today follow liberal recommendations, or can we find examples of mercantilist or even Marxist policies?
- Outline the argument by Rosenberg and Boyle; do you agree with it?

### Guide to further reading

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## CHAPTER 7

# Social Constructivism

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### Summary

This chapter introduces the social constructivist theory of IR. We first clarify where constructivism comes from and why it has established itself as an important approach in IR. Constructivism is examined as both a meta-theory about the nature of the social world and a set of substantive theories of IR. Several examples of constructivist IR theory are presented, followed by reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the approach, including the way these theories have emphasized international-level and domestic-level factors.

## 7.1 Introduction

The focus of **social constructivism** (in shorthand: constructivism) is on human awareness or consciousness and its place in world affairs. Much IR theory, and especially neorealism, is materialist; it focuses on how the distribution of material power, such as military forces and economic capabilities, defines balances of power between states and explains the behaviour of states. Constructivists reject such a one-sided material focus. They argue that the most important aspect of international relations is social, not material. Consequently, the study of international relations must focus on the ideas and beliefs that inform the actors on the international scene, as well as the shared understandings between them. The international system exists only as an intersubjective awareness, or a common understanding, among people; in that sense the system is constituted by ideas, not by material forces. It is a human invention or creation not of a physical or material kind but of a purely intellectual and ideational kind. It is a set of ideas, a body of thought, a system of norms, which has been arranged by certain people at a particular time and place. Examining this kind of international system requires a humanistic emphasis on understanding rather than a natural science emphasis on material factors (Onuf 2018; see Box 7.1).

Some constructivists go one step further and argue that this social reality is not objective, or external, to the observer of international affairs. The social and political world, including the world of international relations, is not a physical entity or material object that is outside human consciousness. It follows that the international system is not something 'out there' like the solar system. It does not exist on its own.

We will get back to the distinction between a more moderate (or conventional) and a more radical (or critical) version of constructivism (see Figure 7.1). Suffice here to say that both camps agree that if the thoughts and ideas that enter into the existence of international relations change, then the system itself will also change, because the system consists of thoughts and ideas. That is the insight behind the oft-quoted phrase by constructivist Alexander Wendt: 'anarchy is what states make of it' (1992: 394; see also Onuf 2018). The claim sounds innocent, but the potential consequences are far-reaching: suddenly the world of IR becomes less fixated on an age-old structure of

### BOX 7.1 Key Quotes: Defining constructivism

Constructivism is an approach to social analysis that

- (a) emphasizes ideational factors, and not just material ones, in explaining social action and interactions;
- (b) asserts that the most relevant ideational factors are shared, 'intersubjective beliefs' not reducible to particular individuals, and
- (c) contends that such ideational factors construct the interests and identities of actors.

**Bertucci, Hayes, and James (2018: 3)**

anarchy; change becomes possible in a big way because people and states can start thinking about each other in new ways and thus create new norms that may be radically different from the old ones.

This chapter introduces the constructivist theory of IR. We first clarify where constructivism comes from and why it has established itself as an important approach in IR over a short period of time. The nature of constructivist theory is examined: is it a meta-theory about the nature of the social world or is it a substantive theory of IR, or is it both? That leads to a brief presentation of the constructivist contributions to IR theory and some reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the approach.

## 7.2 The Rise of Constructivism in IR

Beginning in the 1980s, constructivism has become an increasingly significant approach, especially in North American IR. During the Cold War there was a clear pattern of power balancing between two blocs, led by the United States and the Soviet Union respectively. After the end of the Cold War and following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the situation turned much more fluid and open. This spectacular reconfiguration of an international system that had seemed very stable gave scholars of IR a renewed interest in the role of human agency, or how the world is constantly remade via human intervention. It soon became obvious that the parsimonious and structuralist neorealist theory was not at all clear about future developments of the balance of power. Neorealist logic dictates that other states will equate with the US because offsetting US power is a means of guaranteeing one's own security; such equalizing will lead to the emergence of new great powers in a multipolar system. Waltz (2002) argued that it will eventually happen 'tomorrow'—a prediction that is now two decades old. Another neorealist, John Mearsheimer, argues that the current rise of China and the resurgence of Russia lay the foundation for a multipolar order (Mearsheimer 2019). Other questions came up in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. For instance, it was unclear, based on the material distribution of power, how the US would tackle its unipolar moment. Would it feel free to act unilaterally, would it opt for multilateralism via international institutions, or would it fail to lead at all?

The constructivist claim is that the neorealist failure to understand the balance of power outcomes and the dynamics after the Cold War is closely connected to the fact that the theory is overly sparse and materialist. Constructivists argue that a focus on thoughts and ideas leads to a better theory about anarchy and power balancing, and most importantly a better ability to explain changes in world politics such as those sparked by the breakdown of the Soviet Union. For instance, constructivists point to how 'responsibility to protect' (R2P) principles have made headway at the expense of older principles of non-intervention since the 1990s (see Chapter 5), a development that is difficult to understand from a perspective solely emphasizing materialist factors of power balancing.

Some liberals (see Chapter 4) have basically accepted neorealist assumptions as a starting point for analysis; they are, of course, vulnerable to much of the critique directed against neorealism by constructivists. Other liberals began to focus more on the role

of ideas after the Cold War ended. When Francis Fukuyama (1989) proclaimed ‘the end of history’, he was endorsing the role of ideas and especially the progress of liberal ideas in the world. But he and other liberals are mostly interested in the concrete advance of liberal, democratic government in the world. Even if constructivists are sympathetic to several elements of liberal thinking (see e.g., Wendt 1992), their focus is less on the advance of liberal ideas; it is on the role of thinking and ideas in general. Some constructivists are strongly critical of what they call ‘liberal-idealism’ (Steele 2007).

So, the historical context (i.e., the end of the Cold War) and the theoretical discussion between IR scholars (especially among neorealists and liberals) helped set the stage for the constructivist approach, especially in North America where the neorealist/neoliberal approaches dominated. In Europe, the International Society approach (see Chapter 5) had anticipated the constructivist emphasis on the role of ideas and the importance of social interaction between states. In that sense, there was less intellectual space in Europe for constructivists to fill out. Alexander Wendt’s criticism of the International Society tradition for failing to systematically theorize how social interactions change identities and interests should probably be seen as a reluctant recognition of this fact (see Chapter 5).

At the same time, constructivists were inspired by theoretical developments in other social science disciplines, including philosophy and sociology. In sociology, Anthony Giddens (1984) proposed the concept of **structuration** as a way of analysing the relationship between structures and actors. According to Giddens, structures (i.e., the rules and conditions that guide social action) do not determine what actors do in any mechanical way; an impression one might get from the neorealist view of how the structure of anarchy constrains state actors. The relationship between structures and actors involves intersubjective understanding and meaning. Structures constrain actors, but actors can also transform structures by thinking about them and acting on them in new ways. For example, the development of chemical weapons (in the First World War) and nuclear weapons (in the Second World War) changed the material structures of warfare and international politics; but international actors have subsequently developed what constructivists see as a veritable ‘taboo’ on the use of these weapons, thereby altering the structural constraints they face (Tannenwald 1999; see Chapter 12). The notion of structuration, therefore, leads to a less rigid and more dynamic view of the relationship between structure and actors. IR constructivists, such as Alexander Wendt, used this as a starting point for suggesting a less rigid view of anarchy.

We have noted some recent historical and theoretical developments that help explain the rise of social constructivism in IR. But constructivism is not an entirely new approach. It also grows out of an old methodology that can be traced back at least to the eighteenth-century writings of the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (Pompa 1982) and the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (Hacking 1999: 41; Onuf 2018). According to Vico, the natural world is made by God, but men and women make their own history and even states or state-systems are therefore artificial creations (Pompa 1982: 26). Immanuel Kant argued that we can obtain knowledge about the world, but it will always be subjective knowledge in the sense that it is filtered through human consciousness.

Max Weber emphasized that the social world (i.e., the world of human interaction) is fundamentally different from the natural world of physical phenomena. Human beings



rely on ‘understanding’ of each other’s actions and assigning ‘meaning’ to them. In order to comprehend human interaction, we cannot merely describe it in the way we describe a physical phenomenon, such as a boulder falling off a cliff; we need a different kind of interpretive understanding, or *verstehen* (Morrison 1995: 273–82). Is patting another person’s face a punishment or a caress? We cannot know until we assign meaning to the act. Weber concluded that ‘subjective understanding is the specific characteristic of sociological knowledge’ (1977: 15). Constructivists rely on such insights to emphasize the importance of ‘meaning’ and ‘understanding’ (Fierke and Jørgensen 2001). March and Olson’s (1989) distinction between a rationalist ‘**logic of consequences**’ and a sociological ‘**logic of appropriateness**’ has also been important in the development of constructivism (Fierke 2010: 181). Actors guided by a logic of consequences have clear preferences and calculate the expected payoff of their actions, choosing those that maximize returns. According to the logic of appropriateness, actors instead take their cue from norms and choose the actions that are seen as appropriate given the specific situation. Martha Finnemore, whose work we review later in this chapter, takes as a starting point that ‘a constructivist logic of appropriateness is just as plausible a predictor of human and state behavior as the rationalists’ logic of consequences’ (Checkel 1998: 330; see also Katzenstein 1996a: 4).

### 7.3 Constructivism as Social Theory

We can distinguish between theories placed at different levels of abstraction. Social theory is a more general theory about the social world, about social action, and about the relationship between structures and actors. Such theory is relevant for the entire field of social science. Substantive IR theory, by contrast, is theory about some aspect of international relations. Constructivism is a social theory but there are also a number of substantive constructivist theories of IR; this section is about constructivism as a social theory; section 7.4 is about constructivist theories of IR.

As Barnett (2020) points out, constructivism can be compared to **rational choice theory**, which is a broad social theory about how people act, given certain preferences and certain constraints. In social theory, constructivists emphasize the social construction of reality. The social world is a world of human consciousness: of thoughts and beliefs, of ideas and concepts, of languages and discourses, of signs, signals, and understandings among human beings, especially groups of human beings, such as states and nations. This is the philosophically idealist element of constructivism which contrasts with the materialist philosophy of much social science **positivism** (see Chapter 8).

The social world is in part constructed of physical entities; note that the quote by Wendt mentions ‘material resources’ among those elements that constitute social structures (see Box 7.2). In that sense, materialism is a part of constructivism. But it is the ideas and beliefs concerning those entities that are most important—what those entities signify in the minds of people. The international system of security and defence, for example, consists of territories, populations, weapons, and other physical assets. But it is the ideas and understandings according to which those assets are conceived, organized, and used—e.g., in alliances, armed forces, and so on—that are most important.



### BOX 7.2 Key Concepts: Wendt's constructivist conception of social structures

Social structures have three elements: shared knowledge, material resources, and practices. First, social structures are defined, in part, by shared understandings, expectations, or knowledge. These constitute the actors in a situation and the nature of their relationships, whether cooperative or conflictual. A security dilemma, for example, is a social structure composed of intersubjective understandings in which states are so distrustful that they make worst-case assumptions about each other's intentions, and as a result define their interests in self-help terms. A security community is a different social structure, one composed of shared knowledge in which states trust one another to resolve disputes without war. This dependence of social structure on ideas is the sense in which constructivism has an idealist (or 'idea-ist') view of structure.

**Wendt (1995: 73)**

The physical element is there. But that element is secondary to the intellectual element which infuses it with meaning, plans it, organizes it, and guides it. The thought that is involved in international security is more important, far more important, than the physical assets that are involved, because those assets have no meaning without the intellectual component; they are mere things in themselves.

Wendt illustrates the constructivist view with the following statement: '500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons' because 'the British are friends and the North Koreans are not' (Wendt 1995: 73). Therefore, it is less the material fact of numbers of nuclear warheads that matter; what matters is how the actors think about each other; i.e., their ideas and beliefs. Material facts enter the picture but are secondary to ideas.

Therefore, it is helpful to emphasize the contrast between a **materialist view** held by neorealists and neoliberals and the **ideational view** held by constructivists. According to the materialist view, power and national interest are the driving forces in international politics (Wendt 1999: 92). Power and interest are seen as 'material' factors; they are objective entities in the sense that, because of anarchy, states are compelled to be preoccupied with power and interest. In this view, ideas matter little; they can be used to rationalize actions dictated by material interest. Constructivists do not have a problem with the notion that states pursue their interests. But they argue that these interests have been socially constructed in the first place (Hurd 2008: 310). In the ideational view held by social constructivists, ideas always matter. 'The starting premise is that the material world is indeterminate and is interpreted within a larger context of meaning. Ideas thus define the meaning of material power' (Tannenwald 2005: 19). This constructivist view of ideas is emphasized by Wendt in Box 7.3.

The core ideational element upon which constructivists focus is intersubjective beliefs (and ideas, conceptions, and assumptions) that are widely shared among people. Ideas must be widely shared to matter; nonetheless, they can be held by different groups, such

### BOX 7.3 Key Arguments: The social constructivist view of ideas

The claim is *not* that ideas are more important than power and interest, or that they are autonomous from power and interest. The claim is rather that power and interest have the effects they do in virtue of the ideas that make them up. Power and interest explanations *presuppose* ideas, and to that extent are not rivals to ideational explanations at all . . . Let me [propose] a rule of thumb for idealists: when confronted by ostensibly ‘material’ explanations, always inquire into the discursive conditions which make them work. When Neo-realists offer multipolarity as an explanation for war, inquire into the discursive conditions that constitute the poles as enemies rather than friends. When Liberals offer economic interdependence as an explanation for peace, inquire into the discursive conditions that constitute states with identities that care about free trade and economic growth. When Marxists offer capitalism as an explanation for state forms, inquire into the discursive conditions that constitute capitalist relations of production. And so on.

**Wendt (1999: 135–6)**

as organizations, policy-makers, social groups, or society. ‘Ideas are mental constructs held by individuals, sets of distinctive beliefs, principles and attitudes that provide broad orientations for behaviour and policy’ (Tannenwald 2005: 15). There are many different kinds of ideas. Nina Tannenwald identifies four major types: ‘ideologies or shared belief systems, normative beliefs, cause–effect beliefs and policy prescriptions’ (2005: 15); they are described in Box 7.4.

Constructivism is an empirical approach to the study of international relations—empirical in that it focuses on the intersubjective ideas that define international relations. If the social and political world consists, at base, of shared beliefs, how does that affect the way we should account for important international events and episodes? Constructivists, as a rule, cannot subscribe to mechanical positivist conceptions of causality. That is because the positivists do not probe the intersubjective content of events and episodes. For example, the well-known billiard ball image of international relations is rejected by constructivists because it fails to reveal the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs of the actors involved in international conflicts. Constructivists want to probe the inside of the billiard balls to arrive at a deeper understanding of such conflicts.

The constructivist approach argues that a further development of basic concepts is needed in order to allow for the full analysis of ideas and meaning. A study by Barnett and Duvall of power in global governance provides an example of this. The authors note that their subject:

requires a consideration of different forms of power in international politics. Power is the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their own circumstances and fate. But power does not have a single expression or form. It has several.

**(Barnett and Duvall 2005: 3)**

### BOX 7.4 Key Concepts: Four types of ideas

Ideologies or shared belief systems are a systematic set of doctrines or beliefs that reflect the social needs and aspirations of a group, class, culture, or state. Examples include the Protestant ethic or political ideologies such as liberalism, Marxism, and fascism.

Normative (or principled) beliefs are beliefs about right and wrong. They consist of values and attitudes that specify criteria for distinguishing right from wrong or just from unjust and they imply associated standards of behaviour, [for example] the role of human rights norms at the end of the Cold War.

Causal beliefs are beliefs about cause-effect, or means-end relationships. They . . . provide guidelines or strategies for individuals on how to achieve their objectives . . . [for example,] Soviet leaders' changing beliefs about the efficacy (or more precisely non-efficacy) of the use of force influenced their decision in 1989 not to use force to keep Eastern Europe under Soviet control.

Finally, policy prescriptions are the specific programmatic ideas that facilitate policy-making by specifying how to solve particular policy problems. They are at the centre of policy debates and are associated with specific strategies and policy programs.

**Tannenwald (2005: 15–16)**

The authors go on to identify four different forms of power; they are presented in Box 7.5. The claim is that a full consideration of power in international relations needs to address all four dimensions.

Constructivists generally agree with Max Weber that they need to employ interpretive understanding (*verstehen*) in order to analyse social action (Ruggie 1998). But they are not in agreement about the extent to which it is possible to emulate the scientific ideas of the natural sciences and produce scientific explanations based on hypotheses, data collection, and generalization (Bertucci, Hayes, and James 2018). We need to take note of a general division between a more conventional and a more critical camp within constructivism. As mentioned above, all constructivists agree that the social world is constructed by ideas. This is an ontological point, that is, it concerns what the social world is made of. However, the more moderate or mainstream constructivists combine this with a standard scientific **epistemology**. They accept that the world, socially constructed as it is, can be analysed in an objective way using standard scientific methods (Fierke 2010: 183–4; see Jørgensen 2010; Jackson 2016) (see Box 7.6). This body of scholarship has been called 'conventional' constructivism (Hopf 1998) and it is represented by such scholars as Peter Katzenstein (1996a); Christian Reus-Smit (1997); Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (1998); John Ruggie (1998); Alexander Wendt (1999); Ted Hopf (2002); Martha Finnemore (2003); Alistair Johnston (2014); and Samuel Barkin (2010).

Checkel (1998) captures this mainstream constructivism when he notes that 'constructivists have rescued the exploration of identity from postmodernists' (325) because constructivists 'do not reject science or causal explanation; their quarrel with mainstream

### BOX 7.5 Key Concepts: The concept of power in constructivist analysis

Power does not have a single expression or form. It has several. In this volume we identify four. Compulsory power refers to relations of interaction that allow one actor to have direct control over another. It operates, for example, when one state threatens another and says, ‘change your policies, or else’. Institutional power is in effect when actors exercise indirect control over others, such as when states design international institutions in ways that work to their long-term advantage and to the disadvantage of others. Structural power concerns the constitution of social capacities and interests of actors in direct relation to one another. One expression of this form of power is the workings of the capitalist world-economy in producing social positions of capital and labour with their respective differential abilities to alter their circumstances and fortunes. Productive power is the socially diffuse production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification. A particular meaning of development, for instance, orients social activity in particular directions, defines what constitutes legitimate knowledge, and shapes whose knowledge matters. These different conceptualizations, then, provide distinct answers to the fundamental question: in what respects are actors able to determine their own fate, and how is that ability limited or enhanced through social relations with others?

**Quoted from Barnett and Duvall (2005: 3–4)**

### BOX 7.6 Key Concepts: Ontology and epistemology

**Ontology** concerns *the nature of the social world*; **epistemology** concerns *how we can obtain* knowledge about this world. Ontology thus has to do with how the social world is constructed and who the key actors are (e.g., individuals, classes, states, or civilizations). This is where the question of causality comes to the fore. For instance, constructivists subscribe to the notion that the social world is made up of ideas whereas positivists argue that only material facts (for instance, military capabilities) matter. Epistemology, on the contrary, has to do with how we comprehend and analyse this social world. This is where the question of the methods that we use come to the fore. For instance, conventional constructivists accept that standard scientific methods can be used to analyse social processes created by ideas and norms whereas post-positivists argue that it is impossible to mimic natural scientists in this way in order to treat the social world as a laboratory for testing theories (see also Figure 7.1).

theories is ontological, not epistemological’ (327). Fierke (2010: 183) seems to have the same point in mind when arguing that ‘conventional constructivism’ ‘has occupied a “middle ground” between rationalist and poststructuralist approaches to IR’. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2016: 60) similarly notes that some constructivists are satisfied with making ideational factors yet another variable that can enter standard causal analysis.

According to more radical versions of constructivist philosophy, the social world is not something ‘out there’ that exists independently of the thoughts and ideas of the people involved in it. It is not an external reality whose laws can be discovered by scientific research and explained by scientific theory, as positivists and behaviourists argue. That means that sociology or economics or political science or the study of history cannot be objective ‘sciences’ in the strict positivist sense of the word.

Such ‘critical’ or ‘post-positivist’ constructivists argue that ‘truth claims’ are not possible because there is no neutral ground on which we can decide about what is true (Hurd 2008: 307). Hypotheses about the social world are simply not amenable to testing because there is no data independent of the observers’ point of view to hold it up against (Jackson 2016: 173–4). What we call truth is always connected to different, more or less dominant, ways of thinking about the world. As the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1977) famously argued, truth and power cannot be separated; indeed, the main task of critical constructivism is to unmask that core relationship between truth and power, to criticize those dominant versions of thinking that claim to be true for all.

This distinction between conventional and post-positivist constructivism is illustrated in Figure 7.1. The figure is inspired by Jackson’s (2016) attempt to capture different methodological approaches to IR. We have further developed these distinctions to illustrate the main theoretical divide between the conventional constructivist theories covered in this chapter and the post-positivist theories covered in Chapter 8. The difference between conventional constructivism and critical constructivism to a large extent overlaps with what Hurd (2008) identifies as two different constructivist research strategies: an empirical and a conceptual or philosophical. The ‘downstream’ empirical branch

**FIGURE 7.1** Conventional constructivism versus post-structuralism

	Phenomena of interest to scholars can be directly observed	Many phenomena of interest to scholars cannot be directly observed
World exists independently of observer		Conventional constructivism
World does not exist independently of observer		Critical constructivism (post-structuralist approaches)

Inspired by Jackson (2016: Table 2.1)

‘applied the insights of constructivism to understand interesting patterns, behaviors, and puzzles. The philosophical branch went upstream—it sought to understand the reasons for, and implications of, the differences between constructivism and other approaches to social phenomena’ (2008: 299). In this chapter, our presentation of constructivist scholarship focuses on ‘conventional’ constructivism because it is this strand of constructivism that has done most in terms of developing new substantive theories of IR; ‘critical’ constructivism, which we label post-structuralism, is discussed in Chapter 8.

## 7.4 Constructivist Theories of International Relations

Constructivism was introduced to IR by Nicholas Onuf (1989), who coined the term. It gathered a larger following among scholars with a series of influential articles and a book by Alexander Wendt (1987, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1999). Friedrich Kratochwil, John Ruggie, and Raymond (Bud) Duvall should also be mentioned as founding fathers of constructivism in IR (Onuf 2018). In section 7.3, we have described constructivism as a social theory. Section 7.4 introduces constructivist theories of international relations. Key terms of these theories are summarized in Box 7.7. We begin with Wendt’s seminal contribution.

### BOX 7.7 Key Theories: Social constructivism: key terms and language

- Focus of constructivism: ideas and beliefs that inform the actors on the international scene.
- Material facts are secondary to ideas: ‘500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons’ because ‘the British are friends and the North Koreans are not’ (Wendt 1995: 73). That is to say, it is not the material fact of numbers of nuclear warheads that ultimately matter; what matters is how the actors think about each other; i.e., their ideas and beliefs.
- Structures and actors: ‘[S]tructures exist only through the reciprocal interaction of actors. The means that agents, through acts of social will, can change structures. They can thereby emancipate themselves from dysfunctional situations that are in turn replicating conflictual practices’ (Copeland 2000: 190); because ideas can change, states do not have to be enemies: ‘anarchy is what states make of it’ (Wendt 1992).
- The emphasis is on meaning: is the patting of another person’s face a punishment or a caress? We cannot know until we assign meaning to the act. Constructivists rely on such insights to emphasize the importance of ‘meaning’ and ‘understanding’ (Fierke and Jørgensen 2001).
- Identity: for neorealists, identities and interests are a given; states know who they are and what they want before they begin interaction with other states. For constructivists, it is the very interactions with others that ‘create and instantiate one structure of identities and interests rather than another’ (Wendt 1992: 394). Constructivists argue that we can only discover the intentions of states by studying identities and interests as they are shaped in interactions between states.
- Knowledge about the world: one group of ‘conventional’ constructivists believe that we can explain the world in causal terms; that is, we can find out ‘why one thing leads to another’;





we can understand 'how things are put together to have the causal powers that they do' (Wendt 1999: 372). According to this view, constructivist analysis 'depends on publicly available evidence and the possibility that its conclusions might in some broad sense be falsified' (Wendt 1999: 373).

- Another group of 'critical' or 'post-positivist' constructivists argue that 'truth claims' are not possible and truth and power cannot be separated; therefore, the main task of critical constructivism is to unmask that core relationship between truth and power and to criticize those dominant versions of thinking that claim to be true for all.

### 7.4.1 Cultures of Anarchy

The core of Wendt's argument is the rejection of the neorealist position, according to which anarchy must necessarily lead to self-help. Whether it does or not cannot be decided *a priori*; it depends on the interaction between states. In these processes of interaction, the identities and interests of states are created. For neorealists, identities and interests are a given; states know who they are and what they want before they begin interaction with other states. For Wendt, it is these very interactions that 'create and instantiate one structure of identities and interests rather than another; structure has no existence or causal powers apart from process' (1992: 394). States want to survive and be secure; neorealists and constructivists agree about that. But what kind of security policy follows from this? Do states seek to become as powerful as possible or are they content with what they have? Wendt argues that we can only find out by studying identities and interests as they are shaped in the interaction between states (see Box 7.7).

In concrete terms:

if the United States and the Soviet Union decide that they are no longer enemies, 'the cold war is over'. It is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions. Actors acquire identities—relatively stable, role-specific understanding and expectations about self—by participating in such collective meaning.

(Wendt 1992: 397)

Wendt's 1999 book further develops the argument introduced in the earlier articles. His point of departure is the same as Waltz's: interaction between states in a system characterized by anarchy. However, anarchy need not lead to self-help; that calls for further study of the discursive interaction between states in order to discover what specific 'culture of anarchy' has developed between them. Wendt suggests three major ideal types of anarchy: Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian (1999: 257; see also Guzzini and Leander 2006). In the Hobbesian culture, states view each other as enemies; the logic of Hobbesian anarchy is 'war of all against all'. States are adversaries and war is endemic because violent conflict is a way of survival. Hobbesian anarchy, according to Wendt, dominated the international system until the seventeenth century.

In the Lockean culture, states consider each other rivals, but there is also restraint; states do not seek to eliminate each other, they recognize the other states' right to exist.

**FIGURE 7.2** Cultures of anarchy and degrees of internalization

DEGREE OF INTERNALIZATION	3rd			
	2nd			
	1st			
		Hobbesian	Lockean	Kantian
		DEGREE OF COOPERATION		
Adapted from Wendt (1999: 254)				

Lockean anarchy became a characteristic of the modern states system after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Finally, in a Kantian culture, states view each other as friends, settle disputes peacefully, and support each other in the case of threat by a third party (Wendt 1999: 299). A Kantian culture has emerged among consolidated liberal democracies since the Second World War.

The three different cultures of anarchy can be internalized to different degrees; that is to say, the way states view each other may be more or less deeply shared. Wendt makes a distinction between three degrees of ‘cultural internalization’ (Wendt 1999: 254): the first degree is a relatively weak commitment to shared ideas; the third degree a strong commitment. We get a three-by-three table of ‘degrees of cooperation’ and ‘degrees of internalization’ respectively (see Figure 7.2).

Wendt drives home the point that constructivism is not merely about ‘adding the role of ideas’ to existing theories of IR. Material power and state interest are fundamentally formed by ideas and social interaction. Therefore, states in an anarchic system may each possess military and other capabilities which can be seen as potentially threatening by other states; but enmity and arms races are not inevitable outcomes. Social interaction between states can also lead to more benign and friendly cultures of anarchy.

### 7.4.2 Norms of International Society

Wendt’s analysis is systemic; it focuses on interaction between states in the international system and disregards the role of domestic factors. Martha Finnemore has proposed another variant of constructivist, systemic analysis in her book, *National Interests in International Society* (1996; see also Sloss 2006; Terechshenko, Crabtree, Eck, and



Fariss 2019). Her starting point is the definition of states' identities and interests. Instead of looking at the social interaction between states, her focus is on the norms of international society and the way in which they affect state identities and interests. State behaviour is defined by identity and interest. Identity and interests are strongly influenced by international forces; that is, by the norms of behaviour embedded in international society. The norms of international society are transmitted to states through international organizations. They shape national policies by 'teaching' states what their interests should be.

Finnemore's analysis contains three case-studies: the adoption of science policy bureaucracies by states after 1955; states' acceptance of rule-governed norms of warfare; and states accepting limits to economic sovereignty by allowing redistribution to take priority over production values. The first case-study argues that the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has taught states how to develop science bureaucracies. Science policy bureaucracies did not exist in many states prior to the mid-1950s. At that time, UNESCO began a drive to establish them, with considerable success: they were set up in merely fourteen countries in 1955; by 1975, the number had increased to nearly ninety. UNESCO successfully propagated the idea that in order to be a 'modern civilized' state, having a science policy bureaucracy was a necessary ingredient.

The second case-study is about how states came to accept rule-governed norms of warfare. Again, the argument is that an international organization was instrumental in promoting humanitarian norms in warfare; in this case the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The ICRC succeeded in prescribing what was 'appropriate behaviour' for 'civilized' states involved in war. This would appear to be a 'hard case' for the constructivist approach, because the ICRC could push through new norms in an area that neorealists would consider critical for national interests, namely the right to unconstrained use of force during times of war.

The third and final case-study concerns the acceptance by developing states of poverty alleviation as a central norm of economic policy. Until the late 1960s, the overriding objective of economic policy was to increase production by focusing on economic growth. By the early 1970s, welfare improvement through economic redistribution became a principal goal of economic policy. Finnemore argues that this normative shift was pushed by the World Bank. The bank's president—Robert McNamara—played an essential role; he was convinced that the bank should actively promote poverty alleviation in developing countries.

Martha Finnemore thus argues that international norms promoted by international organizations can decisively influence national guidelines by pushing states to adopt these norms in their national policies. To make the case for this, Finnemore uses two different kinds of empirical evidence: '(1) correlations between the emergence of new systemic norms and changes in state interests and practice; and (2) analysis of discourse to see if actions are justified in ways consistent with the values and rules embedded in the norms' (Checkel 1998: 330). Against neorealism, she argues that the changes unearthed in the case-studies cannot be explained by pure national interests in power-maximization. They need to be explained by a constructivist analysis emphasizing the central role of norms in international society (see Box 7.8).

**BOX 7.8 Key Quotes: Martha Finnemore on norms in international society**

The fact that we live in an international society means that what we want and, in some ways, who we are, are shaped by the social norms, rules, understandings, and relationships we have with others. These social realities are as influential as material realities in determining behaviour. Indeed, they are what endow material realities with meaning and purpose.

In political terms, it is these social realities that provide us with ends to which power and wealth can be used.

**Finnemore (1996: 128)**

In his book, Alistair Johnston (2014) seeks to demonstrate the processes by which norms in the international system change the behaviour of states. During the period 1980–2000, China was facing an increasingly unipolar system, dominated by the United States. At the same time, China was traditionally oriented towards Realpolitik. Still, the country opted to participate and cooperate in international organizations, protocols, and treaties. Johnston argues that this is due to a practice of socialization involving ‘mimicking’, ‘social influence’, and ‘persuasion’. In other words, processes of social learning take place in the interaction of policy-makers from different states. These processes are less connected to material power and have more to do with ‘pro-social’ or ‘good’ behaviour, where Chinese representatives adopt norms which help increase their image and standing in relation to the standards of international society pursued by the representatives of other countries.

### 7.4.3 The Power of International Organizations

The traditional realist view of international organizations (IOs) emphasizes that they exist to carry out important functions for states; they ‘provide public goods, collect information, establish credible commitments, monitor agreements, and generally help states overcome problems associated with collective action and enhance individual and collective welfare’ (Barnett and Finnemore 2005: 161; see also Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Adler 2013; Cupac 2014). This is the way IOs have been viewed by liberals such as Keohane (see Chapter 4) and by mainstream American IPE (see Chapter 10). Barnett and Finnemore’s analysis makes the argument that IOs are much more than servants of states. On the one hand, they are autonomous actors who might exercise power in their own right; on the other hand, they ‘construct the social world in which cooperation and choice take place. They help define the interests that states and other actors come to hold’ (Barnett and Finnemore 2005: 162). IOs are powerful because they are bureaucracies and because they pursue liberal social goals considered attractive by other major actors.

The power of IOs can be analysed on several of the dimensions introduced in Box 7.5. IOs have compulsory power in that they control material resources that can be used to influence others. For example, the World Bank has money and the UN peacekeepers

have weapons; another form of compulsory power is made up of normative resources. The European Union, for example, 'is hard at work persuading members to reconfigure domestic institutions and practices in ways that harmonize with European and international standards' (Barnett and Finnemore 2005: 176).

Institutional power of IOs stems from their ability to guide behaviour in more indirect ways. One major example is the agenda-setting activities of IOs. The organizations are often able to determine the agenda of meetings and conferences held under their auspices. Therefore, they significantly influence what is discussed and what is eventually decided. For example:

the UN Secretary-General's decision to make humanitarian intervention a defining theme of his 1999 address to the General Assembly shaped subsequent discussions. EU officials are renowned for possessing this sort of influence . . . World Bank officials are directly involved in drawing up the agenda for meetings. In this significant way, IO staff can help to orient discussions and actions in some directions and away from others.

**(Barnett and Finnemore 2005: 178)**

Finally, productive power refers to the role of IOs in constituting the problems that need to be solved. In this respect, IOs act as authorities who formulate, define, and present certain problems to others; they also contribute to solving problems by offering solutions and convincing others to accept them. Box 7.9 presents an example of this process; it concerns organizations involved in economic development. By defining the solution to development problems as one of 'more market', they help define what counts as progress and they change social relations in the villages and the families.

In sum, IOs are not purely innocent servants of states; they are frequently powerful actors because they are bureaucracies that promise to deliver goals that others want. But being powerful, IOs are not always necessarily a force for good; they may also follow narrow interests of their own and 'run roughshod over the interests of states and citizens that they are supposed to further' (Barnett and Finnemore 2005: 184).

#### **BOX 7.9** Key Arguments: IOs and productive power

Development agencies have a readymade solution to the problem of development—more market mechanisms. If development is not occurring, then it is because the economy and polity are not organized properly. So, the development agencies propose various policies that are designed to institutionalize market mechanisms but also to teach producers how to respond efficiently and properly to market signals. In this way, they view their goals as transforming self-sufficient 'peasants' into market-dependent 'farmers'. Although development officials see the introduction of the market as a technical solution to the problem of development, the consequence of this technical solution is deeply political because it completely upends social relations in the family, between producers and consumers, and between the village and the state apparatus.

**Quoted from Barnett and Finnemore (2005: 180)**

#### 7.4.4 A Constructivist Approach to European Cooperation

Various aspects of European cooperation have been a central theme in constructivist analyses. Constructivists argue that their approach is particularly relevant for the study of European cooperation. This is because Europe is a complex setting, with many issues on the table and a large number of informal linkages among the actors involved. Under such circumstances, ideas and discourses—the prevailing ways of speaking and thinking that shape how the world is perceived (see Chapter 8)—will have a significant impact. Rather than pursuing fixed preferences, the actors mutually influence each other in their interactions. The study of these processes is well suited for a constructivist approach (Saurugger 2013).

Kenneth Glarbo, for example, studied the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) of the European Union. According to realists, the history of European cooperation in this area is a dismal one. Due to diverging national interests—so runs the realist argument—integration and close cooperation in the high politics area of foreign and security policy will remain blocked, and occasional progress in the field is merely tactical manoeuvring. Taking a constructivist approach, Glarbo tells a different story. His argument is that foreign policy cooperation is not simply the product of national interests; it is due to processes of social interaction, ‘the results of national diplomacies intentionally and unintentionally communicating to themselves and to each other their intents and perceptions of political co-operation’ (Glarbo 1999: 635; see also Chebakova 2008; Richmond 2020). Social interaction builds intersubjective structures that help further cooperation. In other words, EU Member States may not agree on important aspects of foreign policy; but in spite of this, day-to-day practices of political cooperation significantly promote a shaping of common perspectives and mutual coordination. In sum:

integration does prevail within European political co-operation, or at least within the CFSP of recent years, even if this does not totally refute the importance of national interest. Despite interest, however, constructivist theory argues that political co-operation leaves room for a social integration that stems from diplomatic communication processes set up through political co-operation history, and which is not easily discernible from the intergovernmentalist formal codes of CFSP.

(Glarbo 1999: 636)

Studies of this kind have led constructivists towards the analysis of socialization and learning; that is, the ways in which collective understandings are adopted and organized by groups of actors. In other words, how does a norm become a general reference and ‘not just an idea or ideological position of one single individual?’ (Saurugger 2013: 894). Empirical research on this mainly concentrates on specific professional groups active in the EU realm, such as European civil servants, the committee of permanent representatives (COREPER), or members of interest groups.

In a book on *European Identity*, edited by Jeff Checkel and Peter Katzenstein (2009), it is demonstrated that the ‘single European identity’ project pursued by European elites is up against serious obstacles. European publics are sceptical, and a single European identity is not in the making. Rey Koslowski (1999) offers a constructivist approach to

understanding the European Union as a federal polity. He attempts to move on from traditional debates on federalism and the EU, which tend either to advocate the transformation of the EU into a federal state, or anticipate a roll-back towards more conventional intergovernmental cooperation. His argument is that a constructivist approach better reveals European cooperation for what it is rather than the 'either or' perspectives of federalism or intergovernmentalism. Overall, there is now a large number of research projects concerning aspects of EU studies or Europe that take a constructivist starting point. Constructivists claim that they can add nuances and insights to the analysis of European cooperation which are played down or overlooked in conventional analyses of that complex process.

For example, Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2014) shows how even opt-outs—such as those granted to the UK and Denmark in the areas of Economic and Monetary Union and Freedom, Justice, and Security by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty—have tended to strengthen European integration. It has done so by stigmatizing the opting-out strategy and what are seen as inappropriate claims about national sovereignty in the day-to-day interactions of political and administrative elites in Brussels. The UK and Denmark have thus been punished for holding back in these areas, which has sent a strong signal about the costs of staying out of common EU policies. So, rather than creating a 'Europe in bits and pieces' (Adler-Nissen 2014: 2), the opting-out has welded Europe together by stigmatizing 'outsiderness'. According to Adler-Nissen, this has been ignored by traditional IR and European integration theories, which focus on national interests. To fully understand these dynamics, European integration must instead be seen as a social process driven by norms and everyday practices, with a life of its own.

At the same time, the process of Brexit underlines the importance of identities rather than material interests of both the UK and the EU (Gibbins 2020). Self-images play a very important role, as emphasized by Tim Oliver (see Box 7.10).

#### 7.4.5 Domestic Formation of Identity and Norms

Systemic constructivists such as Finnemore and Wendt stress the importance of the international environment in shaping state identities. Other constructivists put more

##### BOX 7.10 Key Quotes: Tim Oliver on Constructivism and Brexit (2017)

In the context of Brexit, the national interests of Britain or the EU will be shaped by whom they think they are and what role they think they should pursue in the world. For Constructivists, any understanding of Brexit will require an explanation of the way in which the UK and the remaining EU's [sic] construct their identities and how these play out vis-à-vis each other. Britain's self-image of itself as a great power and ideas of 'parliamentary sovereignty' can be used to explain its approach, as will the EU's commitment to 'ever closer union' or ideas over the free movement of people.

**Oliver (2017)**

emphasis on the domestic environment. They try to pry open the black box of the state in order to understand how—based on a focus on norms and ideas—international pressures are filtered by domestic factors, and how this makes states pursue different foreign policy goals. One way of moving in this direction is to study how international norms have dissimilar effects in different states and then speculate about the domestic factors responsible for such variation. A volume edited by Thomas Risse et al. (1999) takes on this task in the area of international human rights norms. The authors demonstrate how regime type, the experience of civil war, and the presence of domestic human rights organizations impinge on the degree to which states are ready to comply with international human rights norms.

Peter Katzenstein has written a book on Japan which develops a constructivist argument that culture, norms, and identity matter, also in the core area of national security (Katzenstein 1996a; see also Katzenstein 1996b). This book is part of Katzenstein's general attempt to bring domestic-level variables into the study of IR, which we return to in Chapter 10. Systemic theorizing is inadequate, says Katzenstein, because it does not sufficiently appreciate how the internal make-up of states affects their behaviour in the international system. The emphasis in his analysis is on the domestic normative structure and how it influences state identity, interests, and policy. A major puzzle addressed is the shift from a militaristic foreign policy before 1945 to a pacifist foreign policy after the world war. The analysis explains why there was a broad consensus favouring a militaristic foreign policy before the war and how the norms on which that consensus was based became profoundly contested as a result of the war. The military's position within the government was severely weakened; furthermore, the new constitution committed Japan to a policy of pacifism and put a low ceiling on defence expenditures (1 per cent of the national income). Again, the argument is constructivist, but a systemic analysis is rejected in favour of an analysis of the domestic environment (see Box 7.11).

Ted Hopf has made a study of Soviet and Russian foreign policy that also focuses on the domestic formation of identity in order to understand how national interests are defined and what foreign policies they lead to (Hopf 2002). He seeks to provide 'an

### BOX 7.11 Key Quotes: Peter Katzenstein on the importance of culture and identity

Today's problem is no longer that of E. H. Carr, one of avoiding the sterility of realism and the naïveté of liberalism. Our choice is more complex. We can remain intellectually riveted on a realist world of states balancing power in a multipolar system. We can focus analytically with liberal institutionalists on the efficiency effects that institutions may have on the prospects for policy coordination between states. Or, acknowledging the partial validity of these views, we can broaden our analytical perspective . . . to include culture as well as identity as important causal factors that help define the interests and constitute the actors that shape national security policies and global insecurities.

**Katzenstein (1996b: 537)**

account of how a state's own domestic identities constitute a social cognitive structure that makes threats and opportunities, enemies and allies, intelligible, thinkable, and possible' (Hopf 2002: 16).

State identity is expressed by key decision makers. The identity of key decision makers is uncovered through textual sources, including archives, journals, newspapers, memoirs, and textbooks. Two case-studies are undertaken: Moscow 1955 and Moscow 1999. The claim is that the reconstructed domestic identities go a long way in explaining Soviet/Russian foreign policy in 1955 and 1999 (see Box 7.12).

Even if constructivists have a debate about the relative importance of domestic versus international environments, the disagreement between them should not be exaggerated. Constructivists are united by much more than what divides them; especially, they all emphasize the importance of culture and identity, as expressed in social norms, rules, and understandings (Chul Cho 2012). The social and political world is made up of shared beliefs rather than physical entities. For constructivists, that must always be the starting point for analysis.

#### 7.4.6 Constructivist IPE

Constructivism has also made its entry in to the study of international political economy (IPE, see Chapter 6 and Chapter 10). Leading scholars of IPE such as Peter Katzenstein and Kathleen R. McNamara attempted to provoke a constructivist turn in American IPE in the 1990s. More recently, Rawe Abdelal, Mark Blyth, and Craig Parsons' book, *Constructing the International Economy* (2010), provides a constructivist take on several IPE issues, including IMF policy and operations, liberalization of trade in services, the 'good governance' initiative of the World Bank, and the politics of agricultural trade (see also Thies and Wehner 2019).

The authors argue that there are four 'distinct paths to constructivism' which they label meaning, cognition, uncertainty, and subjectivity. 'Meaning' concerns issues

#### BOX 7.12 Key Arguments: Yücel Bozdaglioglou on the importance of domestic analysis

Domestic political developments can transform identities in several ways. First, domestic developments independent of systemic interaction such as revolutions can change a state's identity and replace it with a new one. Second, through domestic institutional arrangements or elections, the role of domestic political groups/state institutions or individuals in the foreign policy making process can be altered. In this case, the foreign policy discourse can be dominated by entirely new organizations or individuals with different identity conceptions that may perceive the national interest in a different way . . . Considering domestic roots of that change would be a good starting point in the constructivist analysis.

**Bozdaglioglou (2007: 141)**

related to identity; ‘cognition’ looks at practices of information selection and analysis; ‘uncertainty’ is about the formation of institutions and norms; and ‘subjectivity’ includes what we have labelled ‘post-positivist’ constructivism in the analysis of how power relations influence the subjective meanings held by actors. Power thereby helps define what is possible or ‘thinkable’.

These distinctions help demonstrate how constructivism has developed in different directions that focus on various aspects of the chosen subject. One chapter by Jeffrey Chwieroth on neoliberal economics in Latin America, for example, demonstrates the significance of ‘identity’. It focuses on the background of the finance ministers and the heads of the central bank in fourteen countries. If they were trained at Chicago, Stanford, or Columbia, reductions in social spending in order to confront public debt burdens would be higher than if neither had received such training. A chapter by Cornelia Woll takes up ‘uncertainty’ by looking at business lobbying in connection with liberalization of trade services in telecommunications and air transport. Surprisingly, lobbyists supported liberalization. Their position was connected to uncertainty: firms do not always know what they want, and they are influenced by policies and politics. Firms certainly influence policy outcomes, but they also adjust their demands to the agenda of regulators, both in the case of the US and of the EU.

## 7.5 Critiques of Constructivism

Since neorealism is the main theoretical opponent for most constructivists, let us begin with a neorealist critique of the constructivist approach. First of all, neorealists are sceptical about the importance that constructivists attach to norms, in particular international norms. Such norms surely exist, but they are routinely disregarded if it is in the interest of powerful states. Ever since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, writes Stephen Krasner:

Powerful states have violated the autonomy and the integrity of weak ones. The Peace of Westphalia included elaborate provisions concerning religious practices within Germany . . . and specified electoral procedures for the selection of the Holy Roman Emperor. Hardly a testimony to respect for sovereign autonomy. Every other major postwar settlement since 1648 has attempted to restructure domestic political institutions in defeated states . . . If there is an international society out there it has not had much more impact on the behaviour of states than conventional norms about sex, family and marriage now have on the behaviour of individuals in North America and Europe.

**(Krasner 1994: 16–17)**

At the same time, neorealists are not ready to accept that states can easily become friends due to their social interaction. Such a goal may be:

desirable in principle, but not realizable in practice, because the structure of the international system forces states to behave as egoists. Anarchy, offensive capabilities and uncertain intentions combine to leave states with little choice but to compete aggressively with each other. For realists, trying to infuse states with communitarian norms is a hopeless cause.

**(Mearsheimer 1995b: 367)**



The major problem that states face in anarchy, according to neorealists, is a problem that is not sufficiently analysed by constructivists; it is the problem of uncertainty (Copeland 2000). Uncertainty is about the present intentions of other states and it is about future intentions of other states. At any given moment, there may be peace and quiet in the international system. But in anarchy, states are always seeking security; moves in that direction can be misread by other states; that is what the security dilemma is all about. 'Realism only needs states to be uncertain about the present and future interests of the other, and in anarchies of great powers, such uncertainty may often be profound' (Copeland 2000: 200). According to Dale Copeland, Wendt's constructivist analysis overly downplays the fact that states have difficulties in obtaining trustworthy information about the motives and intentions of other states.

The problem of uncertainty is significantly increased by the risk of deception. Constructivists tend to assume that social interaction between states is always sincere and that states genuinely attempt to express and understand each other's motives and intentions. But there is a pervasive element of deception in the relations between many states. Deceptive actors 'will stage-manage the situation to create impressions that serve their narrow ends, and other actors, especially in world politics, will understand this' (Copeland 2000: 202). In other words, are states really peaceful or do they merely pretend to be peaceful? In the case of the Hitler–Stalin pact, it was probably clear to most that it was not based on good and sincere intentions about cooperation between the two states; but it is easy to find other examples where states say one thing and mean another. The analysis by Ted Hopf on Soviet and Russian foreign policy introduced earlier is a case in point. It:

takes at face value comments made by Khrushchev to party gatherings praising China and advocating closer ties. In reality, that is only part of the story. That same year, 1955, Khrushchev warned West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in private conversations that China represented a real threat to the USSR and to the West . . . Which is the real Khrushchevian view of China? One cannot explain Soviet policy in 1955 without engaging in that discussion. (Stent 2005: 185)

Against this critique, constructivists will maintain that anarchy is a more complex entity than posited by neorealists. It need not always lead to self-help, mutual aggression, and the risk of violent conflict. The claim by Mearsheimer, that 'realism was the dominant discourse from about the start of the late medieval period in 1300 to 1989, and that states and other political entities behaved according to realist dictates during these seven centuries' (Mearsheimer 1995b: 371), is not accurate, according to constructivists (see Ruggie 1983; Wendt 1999; Nexon 2009b). On the contrary, in medieval Europe, warfare and power politics cannot be easily separated from religious norms policed by the Catholic Church (see Chapter 1). To be sure, common doctrines such as 'just war' and the Peace and Truce of God were not always respected by the high and mighty, but these normative constraints still affected their actions and how they interpreted the world (Bisson 2009). We might even argue that some constructivists have turned a blind eye to the deep historical sources of many modern international norms (Møller 2020). When Barnett (2020) claims that laws of war, such as the proper treatment of prisoners and

the illegality of summary executions, ‘originated with the emergence of international humanitarian law in the late nineteenth century’, he thus ignores that these laws have much deeper historical foundations, which go back to the Christian culture of medieval Europe where killing defeated (noble) enemies was similarly outlawed and where there were strict normative constraints on how to wage war against other Christians (Sharma 2017).

Without incorporating ideas and social interaction in the study of interests and identities, it will not be possible, say constructivists, to produce a precise analysis about the nature of anarchy in particular historical periods. Furthermore, it may be true that shared ideas about friendship do not reflect a deep commitment between some states; but that point can be addressed by carefully analysing the ‘degree of internalization’ (see Figure 7.2 earlier) of shared ideas. Neorealists, in turn, can retort that Wendt’s ‘first degree of internalization’ reflects a thin commitment to shared ideas among states; at the same time this ‘first degree’ level is commonplace in the real world. Wendt’s ‘first degree’ is thus, in effect, another way of admitting the core relevance of the neorealist analysis of anarchy.

In the recent debates among constructivists and their critics, there is an emerging consensus that norms and ideas do matter in international relations (Havercroft and Duvall 2017). The debate is more about how important they are and how that importance is demonstrated. Positivists of both realist and liberal persuasion look for explicit hypotheses with testable propositions (Moravcsik 2001). Some constructivists have moved in that direction; others call this a submission of mainstream constructivism to the ‘illusion of science’ (Kurowska and Kratochwill 2012: 88; see also Peltonen 2017).

Another critique by neorealists concerns the constructivist view of change. Constructivists:

provide few insights on why discourses rise and fall . . . [therefore, they] say little about why realism has been the dominant discourse, and why its foundations are so shaky. They certainly do not offer a well-defined argument that deals with this important issue . . . Nevertheless, [constructivists] occasionally point to particular factors that might lead to changes in international relations discourse. In such cases, however, they usually end up arguing that changes in the material world drive changes in discourse.

**(Mearsheimer 1995b: 369)**

Robert Jervis contends that constructivists fail to explain:

how norms are formed, how identities are shaped, and how interests are defined as they do . . . [Constructivism] does not, by itself, tell us something about the processes at work in political life, it does not, by itself, tell us anything about the expected content of foreign policies or international relations.

**(Jervis 1998: 976)**

Constructivists claim that they do study change through the analysis of social interaction. It is rather neorealism that downplays change by claiming international relations to be ‘the same damned things over and over again’; a constant logic of anarchy (Wendt 1999: 17). ‘Regarding the mechanisms of change, some constructivists emphasize

collective learning, cognitive evolution, epistemic change and the “life cycles of norms,” all of which involve the institutionalization of people’s knowledge, practices and discourses’ (Adler 2001: 102). Constructivists have paid special attention to how norms diffuse globally and how they are sometimes internalized by domestic actors. A good example is the research of Martha Finnemore, which we reviewed earlier.

The analysis of change points to areas where constructivists can cooperate with liberals and International Society theorists. Liberals (see Chapter 4) focus on processes of democratization, interdependence, and international institutions. These processes can act as inspiration for a constructivist interpretation of why actors choose to cooperate, even to become friends. Indeed, Alexander Wendt’s (1992) early work was emphatically construed as an attempt to marry liberal and constructivist insights in order to develop a ‘liberal claim that international institutions can transform state identity and interests’ (394; see also Jørgensen 2010: 67). Liberal progress can help create norms and ideas of cooperation. As for International Society theorists (Chapter 5), they emphasize the existence of common interests and common values between states. That is precisely what makes relations between states into an international society instead of a mere ‘system of states’. Constructivists can thus cooperate with liberals and International Society theorists. At the same time, International Society theorists may claim that constructivists add little new to the analysis of anarchy already produced by International Society scholars. Wendt readily admits that his identification of three cultures of anarchy is an argument that ‘builds directly on Bull’s’ (Wendt 1999: 253). Yet, it would be unfair to say that constructivists bring nothing new. Their emphasis on the importance of social theory and the detailed analyses of social interaction in international relations breaks new ground. And as we have seen above, several constructivists emphasize the role of domestic norms, an area little studied by International Society theorists.

Some Marxists are critical of constructivism. Wallerstein’s world system theory focuses on the material structure of global capitalism and its development since the sixteenth century (see Chapter 6). This analysis leaves little room for the social interaction analysed by constructivists. Robert Cox’s neo-Marxist view of ‘historical structures’ (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 10) makes more room for ‘ideas’ and will thus be more sympathetic to a constructivist approach.

In sum, neorealism remains the main contender and intellectual opponent of constructivist theory. When it comes to liberal and International Society theory, and even to some versions of neo-Marxist theory, constructivists can find more room for intellectual cooperation.

## 7.6 The Internal Debates among Constructivists

One ongoing debate among constructivists concerns basic social theory (Gould 2017; Havercroft 2017; Bertucci, Hayes, and James 2018; Barkin and Sjöberg 2019). The outline made in section 7.3 recorded the controversy between ‘conventional’ and ‘critical’ constructivists. From the ‘conventional’ camp, Emanuel Adler argues that in order to make an impact in the discipline of IR, constructivists need to develop ‘a coherent constructivist methodological base that suggests a practical alternative to imitating the

physical sciences' (Adler 2001: 109). Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2016: 205–7) urges what he terms 'reflexivists' to formulate a more positive methodology rather than simply criticizing traditional approaches. From the 'critical' side, Maja Zehfuss wants to move in a very different direction: 'the assertion of an independently existing reality, which in itself cannot be proved and seems to demand no proof, works to support particular political positions and to exclude others from consideration' (Zehfuss 2002: 245; see also Kratochwil 2017). In other words, clarification of basic social theory is important for the constructivist research programme.

The debate about basic theory is of course relevant for the constructivist ambition of demonstrating that 'ideas matter'. How exactly is it that ideas matter? Do changes in ideas always come before changes in material conditions? Do ideas guide policy or are they justifications for policy? Should ideas be seen as causes of behaviour in IR or should they rather be seen as constitutive elements that define what IR is all about? (See Tannenwald 2005 for an excellent discussion of these questions; see also Bertucci, Hayes, and James 2018). Further clarification in these areas is of vital importance for the constructivist research programme. The major challenge for constructivists is to demonstrate that ideas matter much more in IR than assumed by other theoretical perspectives.

Likewise, it will be important for constructivists to further clarify the relationship to the approaches that have dominated IR so far: realism, liberalism, International Society, and IPE. To what extent are they compatible with constructivism and how far are they capable of fruitful cooperation? For example, early constructivist contributions indicated a deep gulf between materialist neorealism and a norms-idea-focused constructivism. The debate has demonstrated that the gulf is much smaller: neorealists do recognize the importance of ideas (Dessler 2000); constructivists do recognize the importance of material factors (Sørensen 2008b). Later projects (Schiff 2008; Barkin 2010) draw on constructivist analysis in combination with other theoretical perspectives. Hurd (2008: 301) goes so far as to write that '[t]he constructivist insight has been largely internalized by the discipline'. Benjamin Schiff, for example, wants to explain the development of the International Criminal Court (ICC); his argument is that constructivism, realism, and liberal institutionalism are all relevant in this regard (see Box 7.13). More generally, as Jørgensen (2010: 160–1) argues, constructivism as a social theory can be combined with all substantive theories of IR, including even the patently materialist neorealism.

### **BOX 7.13** Key Arguments: Combining theories to explain the ICC

The constructivists explain development of the consensus on which the Court is based; the realists explain states' compulsions to protect sovereignty and to seek relative advantage; the liberal institutionalists explore how the ICC embodies states' cooperative efforts to improve absolute welfare.

**Schiff (2008: 9)**

**BOX 7.14 Key Theories: Challenges to constructivism**

- Methodological challenges referring to the fact that research based on micro-sociological studies or even detailed case studies . . . do not seem entirely sufficient to understand the extent to which the embeddedness of actors explains their positions in policy negotiations, or the final policy outcome . . . Which macro-sociological world views (if there are any) influence the policy results?
- The establishment of a correlation between ideas, norms or world views and policy outcomes is still not entirely convincing. The central criticism voiced by Andrew Moravcsik . . . that ideas constantly float around . . . and that it is therefore vain to try to understand these often contradictory variables . . . still echoes in constructivist research.
- Finally, some constructivist public policy approaches are in danger of becoming so concentrated with small-scale case studies that they forget to be interested in the bigger picture of European integration . . . Widening the research scope of these approaches might lead to more general comments and less evidence-based research, as norms, ideas or world views can be catch-all terms if not precisely defined.

**Saurugger (2013: 901–2)**

In conclusion, a recent analysis of constructivist scholarship in relation to the EU identifies three challenges to constructivism (see Box 7.14).

Constructivists have demonstrated that ‘ideas matter’ in international relations. They have shown that culture and identity help define the interests and constitute the actors in IR. Whether you agree with constructivists or not, as a student of IR, you should be familiar with the debates raised by the approach, about basic social theory, and about the different ways in which ideas can matter in international relations.

## 7.7 Integrating International and Domestic Factors

As a broad social theory, constructivism defies easy categorization with respect to whether it mostly emphasizes international or domestic factors. When it comes to social theory, constructivism is mainly concerned with the emphasis on the primary role of norms and ideas in human relations compared to material conditions.

More substantive constructivist theories of IR are of course forced to face the ‘levels of analysis’ problem. Here, we can first note that Wendt’s (1992) influential theory solely operates on the systemic level. It is the interaction of states in the international system that determines whether anarchic competition or cooperation prevails, full stop. Much the same can be said about Finnemore’s (1996) emphasis on how international organizations push certain international norms, in turn affecting the behaviour of states in the international system. We can think of these positions as systemic constructivism, challenging systemic realism such as Waltz’s (1979) theory on its home turf. However, the focus on social construction clearly lends itself to incorporating domestic factors. One of the early criticisms of the new constructivist research agenda was that it slighted

this level of analysis. As Checkel (1998: 332) pointed out in an influential early review article, research such as that of Finnemore fails to explain ‘why norms diffuse differentially, that is, why they have so much greater impact in some countries than in others’. Checkel (1998: 342) argued that constructivists were weak on the micro-level and needed to take domestic politics seriously.

The development of a focus on domestic factors was the great contribution of Peter Katzenstein’s work. As we have seen above, many other scholars have moved in the same direction, which we can conceive of as domestic-level constructivism. After a long phase of giving priority to the systemic level, there is thus now a growing body of scholarship which puts emphasis on ideas at the domestic level (Wilson 2019). There is also a growing attention to the interplay between global norms and norms at the regional and local levels (Brazys, Karbo, and Panke 2017; Houghton 2017; Feklyunina 2018; Jung 2019). In other words, constructivist scholarship has begun to integrate the relationship between international and domestic factors in its general analysis of norms and ideas in IR.

## \* Key points

- The focus of social constructivism is on human awareness or consciousness and its place in world affairs. The international system is constituted by ideas and social interaction, not by material forces.
- Social theory is the more general theory about the social world. In social theory, constructivists emphasize the social construction of reality. The social world is not a given. The social world is a world of human consciousness: of thoughts and beliefs, of ideas and concepts, of languages and discourses. Four major types of ideas are: ideologies; normative beliefs; cause–effect beliefs; and policy prescriptions.
- There is an important distinction between a more moderate and a more radical camp within constructivism. Both camps argue that the world is socially constructed (an ontological point), but they disagree with respect to whether the social world can be studied using the standard scientific methods (an epistemological point). This chapter has mainly concerned what we have termed ‘conventional’ constructivists who believe that the (socially constructed) world can be studied in a scientific way.
- Constructivist Alexander Wendt rejects the neorealist position of anarchy necessarily leading to self-help. That cannot be decided a priori; it depends on the interaction between states. In these processes of interaction, the identities and interests of states are created.
- Martha Finnemore argues that identities and interests are defined by international forces; that is, by the norms of behaviour embedded in international society.
- Peter Katzenstein argues that the internal make-up of states affects their international behaviour. The approach is employed to explain the shift in Japanese foreign policy from militaristic to pacifist.

- Ted Hopf focuses on the domestic foundation of identity in a study of Soviet and Russian foreign policy. The claim is that the identities of key decision makers go a long way in explaining foreign policy.
- Constructivists have recently embarked on studies of IPE, demonstrating how attention to 'meaning' and 'cognition' can provide new insights into IPE questions.
- Constructivists have brought home the point that 'ideas matter' in international relations. The critical debate is about how much they matter and what the exact relationship is to policy outcomes.
- Some substantive constructivist theories of IR only include systemic factors, others mainly focus on domestic-level factors. At the same time, the integration of international and domestic factors in constructivist analysis is certainly under way.

## ? Questions

- Social constructivists argue in favour of an ideational view and against a materialist view of the world. They claim that the international system is constituted by ideas, not by material forces. Explain the distinction and discuss whether it is valid.
- Is social constructivism primarily a meta-theory about the nature of the social world or is it primarily a substantive set of theories about IR?
- What are the most important differences between conventional and critical constructivists? How do these differences matter for Checkel's (1998: 347–8) call on constructivists to further develop their 'research design'?
- Identify the four types of ideas discussed by Nina Tannenwald and think of ways in which each type can influence international relations.
- Alexander Wendt says that 'if the United States and the Soviet Union decide they are no longer enemies, "the Cold War is over"'. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Significant global changes have occurred since the end of the Cold War. How can constructivism help us make sense of processes of global change? What does it bring to the table?
- Give examples of substantive constructivist theories that only operate on the systemic level. How could these theories be elaborated by taking domestic-level factors into consideration?

## ■ Guide to further reading

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## CHAPTER 8

# Post-positivist Approaches: Post-structuralism, Postcolonialism, Feminism

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### Summary

This chapter introduces **post-positivist approaches** in IR. Three different strands are discussed. **Post-structuralism** is focused on language and **discourse**; it adopts a critical attitude towards established approaches in that it highlights the ways in which these theories represent and discuss the world. It is particularly critical of neorealism because of its one-sided focus on (Northern) states. **Postcolonialism** adopts a post-structural attitude in order to understand the situation in areas that were conquered by Europe, in particular in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. **Feminism** underlines that women are a disadvantaged group in the world, in both material terms and in terms of a value system which favours men over women. A gender-sensitive perspective on IR investigates the inferior position of women in the international political and economic system and analyses how our current ways of thinking about IR tend to disguise as well as reproduce a gender hierarchy.

## 8.1 Introduction

Max Weber once said that science (including social science) consists of ‘a thoughtful ordering of empirical reality’ (Weber, quoted in Jackson 2016: 193). It sounds simple, but it most certainly is not. That is because there is no agreement about the actual content of the ‘empirical reality’ that we study; nor is there any agreement about what it means to make a ‘thoughtful’ inquiry. As Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2016: 17) has pointed out, philosophers of science do not agree upon a clear set of criteria for science that can be imported by IR scholars. It follows that there is little alternative to **methodological pluralism**, at least if the philosophy of science is to be our umpire. This book has therefore presented a number of theories and approaches, based on very different ontological and epistemological foundations. This chapter covers the most far-reaching alternatives to the theories that have traditionally dominated IR.

*Post-positivist approaches* is an umbrella term for a variety of contemporary issues in the study of IR. What unites them is dissatisfaction with the established theoretical traditions in the discipline, in particular with neorealism, which is seen as the dominant conventional theory. In their critique of established traditions, post-positivist scholars raise both methodological issues and substantial issues. They argue against positivist methodology with its focus on observable facts and measurable data and its ambition to scientifically explain the world of international relations. Post-positivists emphasize that IR theorists (like all other theorists of human affairs) are an integrated part of the world they study.

In that sense, theorists are insiders, not outsiders. They make certain assumptions and create certain images of reality. Because other theorists make other assumptions and create other images, knowledge is not and cannot be neutral. We always need to critically discuss the assumptions and claims made by any theory, because there is no single, final truth out there. There are competing claims about how the world hangs together and what makes it tick. Some scholars call this attitude post-modern; **postmodernism** has been defined as an ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). We shall stay with the label of ‘**post-positivism**’ because we find it to be a more precise term which better captures the three strands of theory we cover in this chapter.

Post-positivists are first and foremost critical of the approaches to IR that are based on positivist methodology. What is the positivist persuasion in IR? Fundamentally, it is a scholarly conviction that there can be a cumulative science of IR of increasing sophistication, precision, parsimony, and predictive and explanatory power. Positivists believe in the unity of science: that social science is not fundamentally different from natural science; that the same analytical methods—including quantitative methods—can be applied in both areas.

The aim is to collect data that can lead to scientific explanation. That requires scientific methodology and a scientific attitude on the part of the researcher. It then becomes possible to provide empirical explanations of political behaviour: to determine ‘why people behave politically the way they do, and why, as a result, political

processes and systems function as they do' (Eulau 1963: 25). Positivism views the social and political world, including international politics, as having regularities and patterns that can be explained if the correct methodology is properly applied. It argues that observation and experience are keys to constructing and judging scientific theories. It holds that there can be an objective knowledge of the world—or at least 'a great deal of intersubjective agreement' (Nicholson 1996: 131). It emphasizes the centrality of empirical propositions; i.e., the reasons for accepting hypotheses are evident from careful observation of reality. 'We observe events and on the basis of these observations hope to predict the consequences of actions carried out now or in the future' (Nicholson 1996: 132).

Jackson (2016) terms IR scholars who subscribe to these standards 'neopositivists'. Scholars grouped in this category accept that there exists a world that is independent of the observer. Moreover, they believe that the important aspects of this world can be directly observed by social scientists because reality is made up of material facts rather than of ideas (see Figure 7.1 in Chapter 7). Hypotheses of interest to IR scholars can thus be tested by observing whether particular causes and particular outcomes go together. For instance, the broad body of work that has tested the 'democratic peace theory' investigates whether, all else being equal, democracies tend not to go to war with each other (see e.g., Russett (2003 [2000]); Hegre, Bernhard, and Teorell 2020; see also Chapter 4). In this guise, neopositivism dominates mainstream IR, especially in America. Most neoliberal and neorealist analyses are premised on neopositivism. According to Jackson, this dominance reproduces itself, which is illustrated by the fact that neopositivists do not have to make the case for their ontological assumptions when presenting their analyses (2016: 60).

Post-structuralists are not at all happy about this way of approaching IR and social science in general. In particular, they reject its *empiricism*, the view that science is based merely on observation of facts. Pure, 'objective' observation is not possible; it requires previous ideas about what to observe and how to go about it, as emphasized by Steve Smith in Box 8.1.

This critique rejects three basic postulates of positivism: an objective external reality; the subject/object distinction; and value-free social science. It follows that there are no world politics or global economics that operate in accordance with immutable social laws. The social world is a construction of time and place: the international system is a specific construction of the most powerful states. Everything that is social, including international relations, is changeable and thus historical. Since world politics is constructed rather than discovered, there is no fundamental distinction between subject (the analyst) and object (the focus of analysis).

The larger consequence of this critique is that knowledge is not and cannot be neutral, either morally, politically, or ideologically. There are a thousand ways of looking at the real world; which distinctions and concepts are more important, and which are less important? Dominant theories underpin and inform practice; that makes them hugely powerful. 'Defining common sense is therefore the ultimate act of political power' (Smith 1996: 13).

**BOX 8.1** Key Arguments: Objective observation not possible

There can be no 'objective' observation, nor any 'brute experience'. Observation and perception are always affected by prior theoretical and conceptual commitments. Empiricism, in other words, underestimates the amount of theory involved in perception and observation. To describe what we experience we have to use concepts, and these are not dictated by what we observe; they are either a priori in the mind, or they are the result of a prior theoretical language . . . Our senses cannot give us access to 'the truth' since there is no way of describing experience independently of its interpretation. There are, therefore, no brute facts, no facts without interpretation, and interpretation always involves theory.

**Smith (1996: 20)**

In sum, post-positivists are critical of any claim of an established truth valid for all. The task is rather to examine the world from a large variety of political, social, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gendered perspectives. That opens up a 'free space' for competing reflections and to arrive at that space is the best we can do as scholars of IR.

Post-positivist approaches move in a number of different directions and take up a variety of substantial issues. We cannot present them all here, but three of the most important ones are discussed: post-structuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism. *Post-structuralism* is focused on language and discourse; it adopts a critical attitude towards established approaches in that it highlights the ways in which these theories represent and discuss the world. It is particularly critical of neorealism because of its one-sided focus on (Northern) states. Neorealism presents a world where a variety of actors (e.g., women, the poor, groups in the South, protest movements) and processes (e.g., exploitation, subordination, environmental degradation) are not identified and analysed. Neorealism, therefore, constructs a biased picture of the world that needs to be exposed and criticized in order to give voice to groups that have traditionally lacked one in international relations.

*Postcolonialism* adopts a post-structural attitude in order to understand the situation in areas that were conquered or dominated by Europe, in particular in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. When Western scholars talk about 'traditional' and 'underdeveloped', 'Third World' countries, they are really constructing certain images of these areas that reflect how the powerful dominate and organize the ways in which states in the South are perceived and discussed. Any real liberation of the South needs to critically expose such images; only in that way can the road be paved for really democratic and egalitarian relationships. More particularly, it is necessary to allow the non-West to become not only an object of serious study but a co-producer of knowledge.

*Feminism* underlines that women are a disadvantaged group in the world, in both material terms and in terms of a value system which favours men over women. A

gender-sensitive perspective on IR investigates the inferior position of women in the international political and economic system and analyses how our current ways of thinking about IR tend to disguise as well as to reproduce a gender hierarchy. We are introducing feminist IR-scholarship in this chapter because most feminists share the post-structural critique of positivism. But we should note that there are also liberal, Marxist, constructivist, and critical theory varieties of feminism.

The post-positivist criticism of traditional theories is, of course, not the first time that methodological issues have been debated in IR. The second debate, between traditionalists and behaviouralists, also raised the issues of theorists inside and outside the subject and of the best ways of approaching the study of international relations (see Chapter 2). Social constructivism (see Chapter 7) focuses on shared knowledge and understanding rather than on material structures and capabilities. But the post-positivist approaches go a step further in their critique of the established traditions in the discipline.

You should be aware that this chapter grapples with a number of complex ontological and epistemological issues, and that the debate about them contains a large number of different views that seldom agree on everything, even if the authors belong to the same (positivist or post-positivist) camp. Several of these nuances will not be discussed here; we simplify in order to paint the larger picture. For a detailed introduction to the philosophical debates connected with positivist and post-positivist approaches, see Lebow (2011), Smith (2016), Suganami (2013), and Jackson (2016). For a good overview of the critique of positivism, see Smith (1996: 11–44).

## 8.2 Post-structuralism in IR

It can be quite difficult to identify a core set of assumptions shared by post-structuralists. But one minimum common understanding is that ‘they explore how the world comes to be represented as it is’ (Zehfuss 2013: 151). All knowledge reflects the interests of the observer. Knowledge is always biased because it is produced from the social perspective of the analyst. Knowledge thus discloses an inclination—conscious or unconscious—towards certain interests, values, groups, parties, classes, nations, and so on. All IR theories are in this sense biased too; Robert Cox (1981) expressed that view in a frequently quoted remark: ‘Theory is always for someone and for some purpose.’

Cox draws a distinction between positivist or ‘problem-solving’ knowledge and critical or ‘emancipatory’ knowledge. Problem-solving knowledge, such as, for example, neorealist theory, is conservative in that it seeks to know that which exists at present: it takes the international system of sovereign states for granted and disregards the way this reality has been constructed by powerful actors in order to pursue their own interests. It is therefore biased towards an international status quo which is based on inequality of power and excludes many people. It cannot lead to knowledge of human progress and emancipation. By contrast, the critical theory advocated by Cox is not confined to an examination of states and the state system but focuses more widely on power and domination in the world. Critical theorists seek knowledge for a larger purpose: to liberate humanity from the oppressive structures of world politics and world economics which are controlled by hegemonic powers, particularly the capitalist United States. They seek to unmask the global domination

of the rich North over the poor South, or the way privileged interests are wreaking havoc with the climate in the name of mass consumption (see Chapter 11). Critical theorists are in this regard pursuing a neo-Marxist analysis. Cox's approach to IPE is presented in Chapter 10; here, we move to that part of post-structuralism that is focused on language and text. This body of theory is indebted to the so-called 'linguistic turn', including the notion of 'discourse' and 'speech acts' (Fierke 2010: 184). **Discourse** concerns the way we assign meaning to reality via language. It sounds innocent, but it is in fact an exercise of power because it makes a huge difference how we label things and people: is a violent event labelled a criminal act—or even an act of terrorism—or is it rather discussed as a legitimate act of warfare or part of a struggle for freedom? Those who can decide this, decide how we perceive the world. A **speech act** is an utterance that stands instead of or might even be said to constitute an action. Good examples of speech acts include promising other people something or warning them about something. For example, in international relations, politicians perform a speech act when they label an issue (such as global warming or migration) as a security problem. By doing so, the speaker claims 'a right to handle the issue through extraordinary means to break the normal political rules of the game' (Buzan et al. 1998: 24).

The starting point is therefore that language is much more than a means of communication; it is 'a process intrinsic to human social activity . . . to engage in a speech act is to give meaning to the activities which make up social reality. Language thus no longer describes some essential hidden reality; it is inseparable from the necessarily social construction of that reality' (George and Campbell 1990: 273). Here, post-structuralists are inspired by the ideas of a series of recent French philosophers, including Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Barthes, Bourdieu, and Baudrillard. In their view, texts are instruments of power, and 'truth' is defined by power over text and speech. Therefore, theory is less a 'tool for analysis' than it is an 'object of analysis'; when we critically analyse the established theories of IR, we can learn how they 'privilege certain understandings of global politics and marginalize and exclude others' (George and Campbell 1990: 285).

Post-structuralists see empirical theory as a myth. Every theory, including neorealism and neoliberalism, decides for itself what counts as 'facts'. In other words, there is no objective reality; everything involving human beings is subjective. The dominant theories of IR can be seen as stories that have been told so often that they appear as 'reality per se' (Bleiker 2001: 38). But they are not; they are stories from a certain point of view which must be exposed as such and contrasted with other stories from other points of view (Valbjørn 2008a). Post-structuralists do not have the ambition of constructing a new theory of IR which would then seek to replace competing theories. They want to critically engage with all theories, to trace how and why they are constructed the way they are, what they shed light on and what they keep in the dark, and they want to interrogate the relationship between knowledge and power that is involved in this construction. Knowledge and power are intimately related: knowledge is not at all 'immune from the workings of power' (Smith 1997: 181; see Box 8.2).

A seminal contribution was Ashley's 1984 article on 'The Poverty of Neorealism' (Ashley 1984; 1986). Neorealism claims that only a few elements of information about sovereign states in an anarchical international system can tell us most of the big and important things we need to know about international relations. And the theory even claims to validly explain international politics 'through all the centuries we can

**BOX 8.2 Key Concepts: Knowledge and power**

All power requires knowledge and all knowledge relies on and reinforces existing power relations. Thus there is no such thing as 'truth', existing outside of power. To paraphrase Foucault, how can history have a truth if truth has a history? Truth is not something external to social settings, but is instead part of them . . . Post-positivist international theorists have used this insight to examine the 'truths' of international relations to see how the concepts and knowledge-claims that dominate the discipline in fact are highly contingent on specific power relations.

**Smith (1997: 181)**

contemplate' (Waltz 1993: 75). Post-structuralist critique of neorealism targets the ahistorical bias of the theory (Ashley 1986: 189; Walker 1993: 123). Because the theory is ahistorical, it leads to a form of reification in which historically produced social structures are presented as unchangeable constraints given by nature (see also Chapter 11). Emphasis is on 'continuity and repetition' (Walker 1995: 309). Individual actors are 'reduced in the last analysis to mere objects who must participate in reproducing the whole or fall by the wayside of history' (Ashley 1986: 291). It follows that neorealism has great difficulty in confronting change in international relations. Any thought about alternative futures remains frozen between the stark alternatives of either domestic sovereign statehood and international anarchy or the (unlikely) abolition of sovereign statehood and the creation of world government (see Box 8.3).

Rob Walker (1993; 2010; Ashley and Walker 1990) posits 'sovereignty' as another conceptual prison of modernity which forces us to think in binary terms of 'inside' and 'outside'. Within the state, we are part of a community of citizens with rights and aspirations to the good life of peace and progress. Outsiders are excluded; our obligations to the members of 'humanity' rest on a much more insecure basis. But the relevance of the inside/outside dichotomy is increasingly challenged by processes of globalization, of intensified relations across borders. Yet both the discipline of IR and the practice of international relations continue to be constituted by the principle of state sovereignty.

**BOX 8.3 Key Quotes: Ashley on neorealism**

[N]eorealism is itself an 'orrrery of errors', a self-enclosed, self-affirming joining of statist, utilitarian, positivist, and structuralist commitments . . . What emerges is a positivist theoretical perspective that treats the given order as the natural order, limits rather than expands political discourse, negates or trivializes the significance of variety across time and place, subordinates all practice to an interest in control, bows to the ideal of a social power beyond responsibility, and thereby deprives political interaction of those practical capacities which make social learning and creative change possible.

**Ashley (1986: 258)**



So, for Ashley and Walker, current neorealist theory and its understanding of dominant concepts such as sovereignty are not really helpful if we are looking for a nuanced and many-faceted understanding of international relations that views the subject from a wide array of different social, political, and philosophical standpoints. That is because these theories and concepts close us off from alternative viewpoints; they do so by claiming that their way of looking at the world is universally true and valid. But that is not the case.

David Campbell, for example, argues that foreign policy is not a given activity concerning relations between states. It is an ongoing process of producing boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘one of the boundary-producing practices central to the production and reproduction of the identity in whose name it operates’ (Campbell 1992: 75). ‘For the state’ says Campbell, ‘identity can be understood as the outcome of exclusionary practices in which resistant elements to a secure identity on the “inside” are linked through a discourse of “danger” with threats identified and located on the “outside”’ (1992: 75). That is to say, ‘foreign policy’ is a continuing power game on many different levels of society where the exact definition of the danger stemming from anarchy can take many different forms, be it international terrorism, illegal immigrants, or anything else. Our focus should then be on the discursive practice that establishes such boundaries because they also have consequences for identities (who ‘we’ are) and the domestic social order ‘we’ entertain (Campbell 1998). It is thus these very processes that create antagonistic states by—using a binary logic—making societies holistic entities that differ from outsiders.

It follows that security threats are not objectively given phenomena; they are discursively constructed through speech acts. This is the analytical focus of the ‘Copenhagen School’ founded by Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan (Buzan et al. 1998; Wæver 2015). ‘Securitization’ is the speech act through which state actors transform issues into matters of ‘security’, understood as a radical form of politization that enables the use of extraordinary measures in the name of ‘security’. For example, following the September 2001 attack on New York and Washington (‘9/11’), political actors have managed to ‘securitize’ the threat of terrorism, which has justified political measures that have arguably often been disproportional to the magnitude of the threat (see Chapter 11).

Post-structuralists go on to argue that current neorealist theory is not at all representative of the rich philosophical tradition of realism. If one goes back to the original texts of such realist scholars as Hans Morgenthau or E. H. Carr, there are many more tensions and nuances pointing to a richer and more diversified understanding of international relations than is the case with present-day neorealism (Ashley 1981; Jackson 2016: 207). That is to say, different readings of the realist tradition that move in directions other than the dominant views are possible and urgently required.

Further, this reductionism is an act of power: if there are no alternative understandings, there can be no alternative futures. By questioning traditional theories and concepts, post-structuralism represents ‘the great skepticism’ (George and Campbell 1990: 280) of our time. By refusing to privilege any particular point of view, post-structuralism aims to keep the future open and undecided and that is the only possible road towards real freedom (see Box 8.5).

A major contribution of post-structuralism to IR is the critical examination of the discipline’s dominant theories and concepts, including the implicit exercise of power that



**BOX 8.4 Key Quotes: Campbell and Bleiker on Power and Identity**

There is no human nature shared by all members of the species—the nature of individuals, their humanity, is produced by certain power structures. . . . How have the identities of women/men, Western/Eastern, North/South, civilized/uncivilized, developed/underdeveloped, mad/sane, domestic/foreign, rational/irrational, and so on, been constituted over time and in different places? All of which means that *identity*, *subjectivism*, and *power* are key concepts for poststructuralism.

**(Campbell and Bleiker 2020: 207)**

decides who has construed these theories and concepts. Scholars have a tendency to claim too much for their theories. Neorealism is a good example: it does not really live up to its billing; it provides less knowledge of IR in the broadest sense than it claims to provide. That is because neorealism and other conventional IR theories focus too much on modern, sovereign states as they developed in Europe and elsewhere. That provides us with less information about a host of other important issues related to global international relations (see Box 8.4).

Post-structuralism is sceptical of the notion of universal truths that are said to be valid for all times and places. That is typical of realism and also of much liberalism. It follows that all theories have a history: they can be located in terms of space, time, and cultural attachment. In that sense, theories are not separate from the world; they are part of it. Therefore, says Steve Smith, ‘there can never be a “view from nowhere,” and *all* theories make assumptions about the world, both ontological ones (what features need explaining) and epistemological ones (what counts as explanation)’ (Smith 2010: 9). For that reason, a proliferation of different theories in IR is highly desirable; a larger number of competing views opens up and enhances our understanding of the subject.

Critics are not convinced. Their charge against post-structuralism is that it spends a lot of time criticizing others and very little time coming up with its own analysis of international relations. Post-structuralists are cannibalistic: they thrive on critique but come up with little in terms of their own view of the world. Post-structuralists need to convince us, says Robert Keohane, that they ‘can illuminate important issues in world

**BOX 8.5 Key Theories: The politics of post-structuralism**

Poststructuralism, by definition, is an emphatically political perspective. But it is one which refuses to privilege any partisan political line, for it equates such privileging with the grand, universal claims for unity and truth in modern theory, and the dogma of the hermetically sealed tradition. It is in the act of not privileging that it offers emancipation and liberation.

**George and Campbell (1990: 281)**

politics'; until that happens, 'they will remain on the margins of the field, largely invisible to the preponderance of empirical researchers, most of whom explicitly or implicitly accept one or another version of rationalistic premises' (Keohane 1989: 173). Thomas Biersteker suspects that post-structuralist critique will lead us down blind alleys: 'How are we to ensure that post-positivist pluralism, in the absence of any alternative criteria, will avoid legitimizing ignorance, intolerance, or worse?' (Biersteker 1989).

Post-structuralists reject this critique because they see in it an act of power; those defending established theories in IR request of the marginalized critics to 'become like us'—adopt a certain viewpoint, accept conventional assumptions about how the world hangs together and from there, get on with your work. In Ashley and Walker's formulation, 'the choice is presented as one of disciplinary authority versus a gathering of marginal challengers of unproven legitimacy: the maturity and wisdom of elders versus the bravado of tawdry youth' (1990: 373). But this is exactly what post-structuralists want to avoid; they refuse to be boxed into a certain standpoint 'a position, a subjective perspective that enables them to justify what they say and do' (Ashley 1996: 241). The intellectual posture of a post-structuralist is a different one from that of the agnostic critic, welcoming as many different viewpoints on international relations as possible from different locations in terms of cultural, political, ethnic, social, and other positions.

Nonetheless, it is worthwhile recalling Wæver's (1996: 169) warning that post-structuralists need to avoid placing themselves beyond the 'boundary of negativity' where they have little constructive to offer IR. It is encouraging that over the last few decades a new generation of post-structuralist scholars have taken up substantial issues of IR and analysed them with post-structuralist concepts and frameworks. This represents a new development of post-structuralism in IR; instead of critique of others, focus is on substantial analysis of international affairs. One major example in this regard is Lene Hansen's book on Western decision-making in relation to the war in Bosnia (Hansen 2006). Hansen argues that post-structural discourse analysis is better suited to understand the Western debate on the war in Bosnia than is a positivist approach. The study sets forth a post-structuralist theory about the relationship between identity and foreign policy. In this view, the formulation of foreign policy is not merely about taking concrete measures; policy is 'performatively linked' to identity. Facts and events are constituted by the discourses through which they are presented. Hansen identifies a 'Balkans discourse' and a 'Genocide discourse' in the Western debate and traces the role of these discourses in an American and a British setting. In this way, the study throws new light on the ways in which discourse and the formation of national identity are linked (for a different take on identity, see Edkins 2015).

The study by Hansen is an example of how discourse analysis can be used to further a post-structuralist study of the ways in which our perception and understanding of security developed in relation to the war in Bosnia. The employment of discourse analysis presents one possible way forward for post-structural analysis (Neumann 2008); but post-structuralists will remain careful not to favour one theory over another. A plurality of theories will always be necessary and it is always important to ask critical questions about the assumptions made by any theory.

### 8.3 Postcolonialism in IR

Postcolonialism is inspired by post-structuralism. We have noted the critical attitude of post-structuralism towards the ways in which established approaches represent and analyse the world. Postcolonialism adopts this critical attitude and turns it in a specific direction: focus is on the relationship between, on the one hand, Western countries in Europe and North America (the 'Global North'), and, on the other hand, the areas in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere that were colonized or dominated by Western countries (the 'Global South').

Since the end of the Second World War, a process of decolonization has taken place. Previous colonies are now sovereign states and members of the international society of states; they are formally equal with Western states. But postcolonialism argues that the logic and ideas underpinning the relationship between the West and these areas continue to be one of hierarchy, reflecting Western concepts and understandings. Intellectual strategies of 'decolonization' are needed in order to liberate our thinking from that Western dominance. Postcolonialism, then, is about different ways of critically undertaking this process of intellectual decolonization. There is a tendency to write developing countries out of the dominant narrative of international relations. The bipolar stand-off during the Cold War, often understood as a period of 'long peace' with stable hegemonies on both the Western and the Eastern side, is not a view of the world that allows a place for the postcolonial countries of the Global South. They come into the picture as culturally backward, deficient, and unstable areas, threatening international order through terrorism and migration, not as states and people that deserve the same recognition and respect that states in the Global North grant each other (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004).

**Eurocentrism**, according to John Hobson, is 'the assumption that the West lies at the centre of all things in the world and . . . [the West] is projecting its global will-to-power outwards through a one-way diffusionism so as to remake the world in its own image' (2007: 93). The task for postcolonialism is to abandon this way of thinking and offer a different analysis which treats and respects the dominated areas on their own terms (see Box 8.6).

#### BOX 8.6 Key Theories: The postcolonial position

IR is constructed around the exclusionary premise of an imagined Western subject of world politics. Decolonising strategies are those that problematise this claim and offer alternative accounts of subjecthood as the basis for inquiry. The recognition of possible alternative subjects of inquiry is the essential precondition for a dialogic mode of inquiry in IR . . . without challenging the implicit and assumed universality of a particular subject, the possibility for genuine dialogue—rather than simply conversation—in the discipline becomes remote.

**Sabaratnam (2011: 785)**

**BOX 8.7** Key Quotes: Said on Orientalism

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurrent images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.

**Said (2003 [1978]: 1–2)**

In making this argument, postcolonial IR theorists draw on studies from other disciplines including historical and literature studies. A major early contribution to the postcolonial project was offered by Edward Said (professor of comparative literature) in his book on *Orientalism* (2003 [1978]). Said argues that the intellectual dominance of the West and the corresponding suppression of the Orient—the 'East' as seen from Europe, that is the Middle East and Asia—are reflected in the ways in which the Orient is represented in Western thinking. Oriental societies are backward, traditional, and despotic. Western societies, by contrast, are advanced, modernized, and democratic. Western thinking is substantially uninterested in the 'Orient'. Instead of trying to understand the vast tapestry of different cultural, social, economic, and political traditions and practices, the Western view of the Orient is a dark counterpoint of irrationality in contrast to the Western light of civilization and rationality. The enlightened identity of the West is reinforced by contrast with the backward Orient; describing the Orient as a backwater becomes a way of construing the West as a beacon of modernity (see Box 8.7).

Power and knowledge are intimately connected in this view. If the Orient is backward, traditional, and underdeveloped, it is only logical and rational that it is subjected to Western dominance in order to be able to progress towards modernity and civilization. It is a view that can legitimize various kinds of power politics, from intervention in Iraq and elsewhere, to the defence of Western borders from large groups of Oriental peoples.

Yves Winter (2011) reflects on the concept of 'asymmetric' war, a notion frequently used to characterize conflicts between states and non-state actors. He argues that the notion of asymmetry carries normative implications because powerful states are portrayed as vulnerable victims of 'uncivilized warfare'. In that way, the notion of asymmetry allows states to take extraordinary measures against civilians: 'to selectively rationalize brutal tactics against non-state actors . . . and to defend manoeuvres that cause high casualties among civilians' (Winter 2011: 490) (see Box 8.8).

Roxanne Lynn Doty discusses the US colonization of the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century. Her argument is that the process of colonization was enabled by a previous discourse which established a hierarchical relationship between the United States and the Philippines. The former are Western peoples representing civilization, liberty, enlightenment, and progress. The latter are uncivilized, primitive, backward, and in need of civilized leadership; they must be 'willingly or unwillingly brought into the light' as one American observer wrote in 1900 (quoted in Doty 1996: 340). The

### BOX 8.8 Key Quotes: Barkawi and Laffey on Eurocentrism in security studies

Eurocentric security studies regard the weak and the powerless as marginal or derivative elements of world politics, as at best the site of liberal good intentions or at worst a potential source of threats. Missed are the multiple and integral relations between the weak and the strong. Across diverse fields of social inquiry, it is taken for granted that the weak and the strong must be placed in a common analytic frame, as together constitutive of events, processes and structures. In contrast IR, and security studies in particular, mainly proceed by attending to the powerful only.

**Barkawi and Laffey (2006: 332–3)**

whole process of colonization is facilitated by this construction of different identities. By contrast, the US never considered colonizing Spain after the Spanish–American War, although it had the capabilities of doing so. The colonial discourse created a social context that was decisive in paving the way for actual colonization; ‘if we want to understand possibilities for international relations more generally, it is important to examine the processes that construct the “reality” upon which such relations are based’ (Doty 1996: 343).

Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes (2008) adopt a ‘decolonizing’ strategy to reanalyse the Cuban missile crisis. The vast majority of IR scholars look at the crisis as a major confrontation between two superpowers, involving decision-making, deterrence, and nuclear proliferation. In this way, a ‘heroic missile crisis myth’ is created where the United States and the Soviet Union stood ‘eyeball to eyeball’. Laffey and Weldes argue that the Cuban position on the crisis has been almost entirely ignored in this view. The marginalization of Cuba ‘obscures the pre-1961 origins of the crisis in a persistent pattern of US aggression and subversion of the Cuban revolution’ (Laffey and Weldes 2008: 564). A full understanding of the missile crisis is only possible when the Cuban position is considered, in particular as concerns its historically subordinate position to the United States. The American interpretation emphasizes how ‘Cuba had vacated its sovereignty by aligning itself with the Soviet Union’; in that sense, the United States ‘constructed a Cuba whose concerns could be ignored’ (Laffey and Weldes 2008: 562). In other words, taking the Cuban viewpoint seriously puts a larger responsibility on the US and throws light on Cuba’s subordinate position in the hierarchy of states (see also Tickner 2003).

Another aspect of postcolonialism’s critique of Eurocentrism involves turning a critical eye towards the West. One does not have to go too far back in history in order to discover that Europe was not a repository of potential modernity, enlightenment, and progressive development. European state-building history is one of massive violent conflict and extermination (Tilly 1990; Mann 2005); a number of areas failed to develop for a considerable period of time and were ‘peripheral’ rather than ‘core’ economies (Senghaas 1982). Moreover, the Europe we know was created by an internal colonization of frontier zones such as the Iberian Peninsula and the areas east of the Elbe that began

around 1000. This process of conquest and colonization was carried out by military and cultural means by actors hailing from the areas that had been part of the Carolingian Empire (present-day France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Northern Italy, Northern Spain, and the Low Countries), with the Normans playing a particularly important role. It resulted in the Germanification of large swathes of areas east of the Elbe, the Christianization of hitherto pagan Baltic people, and the forced expulsion or conversion of Muslims in today's Spain, Portugal, and Sicily. As British historian Robert Bartlett (1993: 314) sums up in his magisterial *The Making of Europe*:

The European Christians who sailed to the coasts of the Americas, Asia and Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries came from a society that was already a colonizing society. Europe, the initiator of one of the world's major processes of conquest, colonization and cultural transformation, was also the product of one.

The propagation of liberal values of freedom and equality was a rather late occurrence, taking place in hard struggles against elites that supported hierarchy and imperialism (Jahn 2005). Non-liberal ideologies, such as fascism and Nazism, played important roles in Europe in the twentieth century. In short, 'the West' needs to be deconstructed as 'the primary subject of world history' (Sabaratnam 2011: 787).

Overall, postcolonialism is critical of established, Western views, because where these views rule supreme, genuine dialogue is not possible. A new situation can only be created by making different voices heard in world politics, in particular the marginalized voices from the developing world who have not so far received any representation. At the same time, the call for dialogue also means that postcolonialism does not aim at entering a 'win-or-lose' battle with existing theories. Rather than 'ships passing in the night', the idea is that established IR theories and postcolonialism can both benefit from engaging with each other (see Box 8.9).

In recent years, an influential new body of scholarship has called for the establishment of a genuine 'Global IR' which is enriched by a diversity of voices, rather than solely listening to those emanating from the Western research environments which have

#### BOX 8.9 Key Arguments: Postcolonialism and established IR theories

[We contend] that there should be an engagement between postcolonialism and international relations; that each approach would benefit from being situated in relation to the other; that the opening up of differences would spark rethinking and perhaps suggest new avenues of inquiry . . . Dialogue should proceed on terms that acknowledge that the two have different strengths that are intrinsic to their intellectual formations. In the case of postcolonialism this would involve recognition that its imaginative and critical capacities are tied to its free-floating character . . . That is to say, postcolonialism cannot of itself be the principal repository of scholarly understanding of the North–South relationship and the architect of Third World futures.

**Darby and Paolini (1994: 371)**

**BOX 8.10 Key Quotes: On a Global IR**

IR has been quite focused on questions of importance to the great powers of the Eurocentric Westphalian system. Curiously, missing from IR's central concerns have been issues of race and empire. The effects of centuries of colonial domination are having huge consequences for the instability of today's global order, something that makes this omission quite surprising. . . . I believe that if we are to advance a truly global IR, questions of race and empire need to be brought more centrally onto the agenda.

**(Tickner 2016 : 158)**

[I]t is the universities, scholars, and publishing outlets in the West that dominate and set the agenda. IR scholarship has tended to view the non-Western world as being of interest mainly to area specialists, and hence a place for 'cameras' rather than of 'thinkers' (Shea 1997), for fieldwork and theory-testing, rather than for discovery of new ideas and approaches. As a discipline, IR has neither fully accounted for, nor come to terms with, colonialism and its legacy. Thus, the IR community is complicit in the marginalization of the postcolonial world in developing the discipline.

**(Acharya 2014: 648)**

traditionally dominated the discipline (see Box 8.10). While this new research agenda transcends postcolonialism in the narrower sense, it clearly draws on the insight presented by several generations of postcolonial research.

In an attempt to rebalance the 'Western bias' of IR, Arlene Tickner and Karen Smith (2020) have helped promote the debate by bringing together a collection of how IR is studied in sixteen different areas of the world. The book provides a comprehensive introduction to the alternatives that exist for understanding world politics differently from the dominant Western view (see also Hobson 2012 and Tickner and Wæver 2009).

In what way should the move towards Global IR take place? We can identify three major positions in the debate on that question (Wæver 2018: 566); they are the 'traditionalists', the 'moderates' and the 'radicals' (Gelardi 2019: 51–3). The traditional group points to the demand for more diversity, both in terms of scholars taking part in the debate, and in terms of the subjects they study. That is, more scholars from the Global South undertaking more analyses of issues concerning the Global South. Mainstream theories are not under direct attack, but they are requested to address Global South issues in a more diverse manner (see, for example, Goh (2019)). The 'moderates' go one step further. They argue for the revision of existing theories and the inclusion of new perspectives. The Global South should be a place for 'the discovery of new ideas and approaches' (Acharya 2014: 648). This will strengthen IR 'with the infusion of ideas and practices of the non-Western world' (Acharya 2017: 823).

Finally, the 'radicals' want to abandon the straitjacket of existing Western scholarship because it is so infused with Western values and ways of thinking. In the words



of one group of 'radicals', '[t]rying to write from within [established, Western] IR, we find ourselves prisoners in our own vocation. We are speechless, or even worse, cannot find words to represent the world and those within it' (Burke et al. 2016: 502). In other words, a breakout from existing theoretical frameworks and a radical move towards new theories and approaches is necessary to promote real diversity of thought in IR.

The three positions will probably all remain in the debate for some time to come. In their different ways, they all contribute to a move towards more diversity in the discipline.

## 8.4 Feminism in IR

Gender issues have received increasing attention in recent decades in many areas of the social sciences. IR feminists focus on basic inequalities between men and women and the consequences of such inequalities for world politics. Gender refers to 'socially learned behaviour and expectations that distinguish between masculinity and femininity' (Runyan 2018: 5). We currently live in a gendered world in which qualities associated with 'masculinity' (e.g., rationality, ambition, strength) are assigned higher value and status than qualities associated with 'femininity' (e.g., emotionality, passivity, weakness). These characteristics do not necessarily apply to individual men and women, they are ideal types; but the qualities connected to masculinity are often assigned a higher value than those connected to femininity. This opens a road to hierarchy and inequality: a system of power where maleness is privileged over femaleness.

Many feminists are inspired by post-structuralism in that they are critical of the ways in which conventional IR scholars approach the study of world politics. Conventional approaches contain gendered thinking; the feminist critique points out that the realist idea of security, for example, is a masculinist way of looking at the world. Realist security is based on military defence of states in an international anarchy; but that conceals the continued existence of a gender hierarchy in world politics in the sense that protection from an outside threat is also protection of a domestic jurisdiction that underwrites a persisting subordination of women (Sylvester 1994). Laura Sjoberg has applied a gender perspective to the wars in Iraq (Sjoberg 2006; see also Sjoberg 2013). In this context, women formally enjoy a status as protected; they are uninvolved civilians. But instead of security, this situation leads to gendered violence because there is no concern for the real protection of women. Iraq is not a unique case; violent conflicts almost always contain a gender dimension that reveals the extraordinary hardships of the affected women and families (Chandler et al. 2010).

Feminist approaches emerged in the discipline in the late 1980s. The formal 'breakthrough' for feminist perspectives is sometimes connected with the establishment of a seminar course on 'gender and IR' at the London School of Economics in 1988. An important book from this period is Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (1989). Enloe argued that gender was of huge importance in the world but this remained undiscovered in IR. She went on to demonstrate the subordinate, yet vital, position of women in a number of areas, especially in the international economic order. Many low-paid, low-status, industrial jobs are now



undertaken by women from developing countries. Women occupy the low-end jobs in the service sectors (cleaning, washing, cooking, and serving).

But it is not merely the international division of labour that subordinates women. International politics also depends on men's control of women, as (passive and serving) diplomatic wives, around foreign military bases (the sex industry), and so on. Her major point is that gender is crucial in international politics and economics ('gender makes the world go around') but remains invisible because the private relationships between men and women rely on conventional definitions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', which subordinates women to men.

Cynthia Weber criticizes the conventional approaches to US foreign policy in Latin America. She does so by presenting an alternative, radical gender perspective on those relations. The perspective is queer theory, and the argument is that US foreign policies in the Caribbean can be seen as an attempt to 'fake' phallic power. That is because US policy is animated by a masculine identity crisis. Castro has castrated the US body politic by denying 'him' the normal (or 'straight') exercise of hegemony in the Caribbean. In order to 'fake' phallic power the US must strap on a queer organ which serves to recover 'America's international phallic power' while at the same time 'throwing its normalized (or straight) masculine hegemonic identity into a crisis' (Weber 1999: 7; see also Sjoberg 2016).

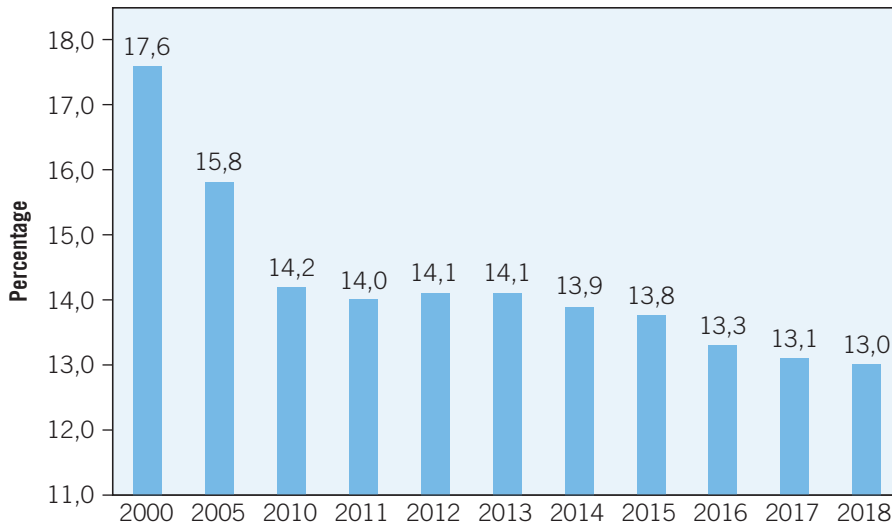
Feminism is also inspired by postcolonialism. The latter wants to criticize and deconstruct the Eurocentrism that pervades IR because it marginalizes and subordinates the developing world; the former wants to engage critically with the masculine biases that inform IR, in order to develop gender-sensitive accounts that restore and highlight the position of women (see Box 8.11).

There can be little doubt that compared with men, women are a disadvantaged group in the world. Women make up less than 7 per cent of the heads of state and only 25 per cent of the members of national parliaments. 62 per cent of women aged 25–54 are a

### BOX 8.11 Key Theories: Postcolonial feminism

Postcolonial feminism . . . resists Euro-American feminists' tendency to universalize the forms of oppression they face in their own lives, a tendency which ignores the crucial differences in the way women from various national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds experience gender. Postcolonial feminism reminds us that 'equality' looks different for, say, a white middle-class woman in the US and a Muslim woman in Iran, and it denies the idea of universal oppressions. If Euro-American feminist movements focus on the gender pay gap, unpaid domestic labor, or the dehumanizing aspects of pornography, these forms of oppressions and subsequent resistance are not necessarily useful for women outside of Euro-America. Therefore, postcolonial feminism goes beyond Euro-American ideals about what gender equality looks like, depending on the social, political, and historical context of the country which the discussion is based around.

**Kamran (2017)**

**FIGURE 8.1** Gender wage gap, OECD average, 2000–18

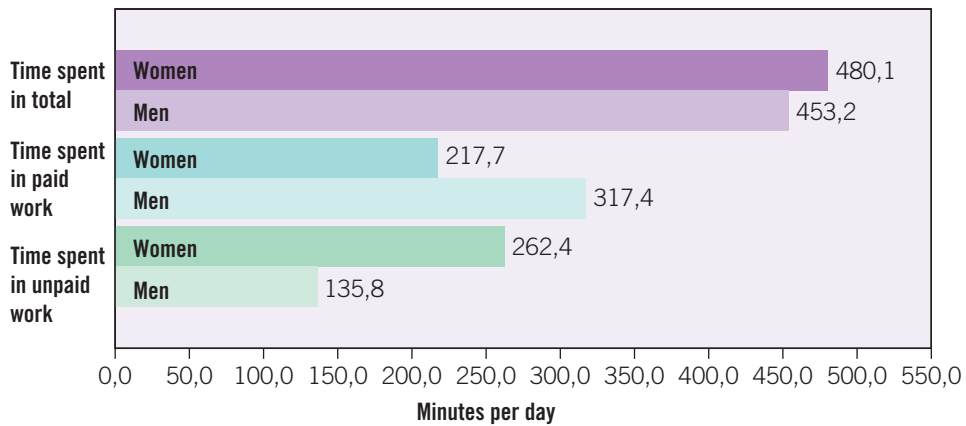
Source: OECD 2019: Employment: Gender wage gap. Available at: <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54751> (Accessed on: 30 October 2020)

part of the workforce as opposed to 93 per cent of men, and women account for 59 per cent of the illiterate youth aged 5–24. The global gender pay gap is 16 per cent, in some countries, women are paid up to 35 per cent less than men, and even in OECD countries the gender wage gap is substantial (see Figure 8.1). Women are also 25 per cent more likely to live in extreme poverty (UNICEF 2018; UN Women 2020a).

At the same time, statistical and other indicators of development conceal the reality that many women face. Growth rates, the gross national product per capita, unemployment rates, etc., reveal little about the secondary position of women. A gender-sensitive focus on world politics seeks to bring gender inequalities into the open, to demonstrate empirically the subordinate role of women, and to explain how the working of the international political and economic system reproduces an underprivileged position for women. For example, Runyan (2018) points out that much work done by men is visible and paid, while much work done by women is invisible and unpaid (see Box 8.12; Figure 8.2). Gender inequality and discrimination can be found in all societies, even in the advanced industrialized countries where women have high rates of participation in the workforce.

We have noted how many feminist scholars are inspired by post-structuralists and postcolonialists. But feminist IR draws on other theoretical perspectives as well, including constructivism, liberalism, and Marxism. These different theoretical commitments create tensions because they invigorate the general debate between positivist and post-positivist approaches. Many feminists reject the devotion to a positivist methodology and a single standard of methodological appropriateness. They suspect that claims about any universal truth are based on a more narrow masculine perspective. Therefore, many feminist scholars are worried that an alliance with established approaches will inevitably become a *mésalliance*; they fear that it will involve the subordination of a

**FIGURE 8.2** Time spent in paid and unpaid work by gender, OECD average, latest available year for all countries (age group 15–64)



Source: OECD 2018: Time spent in paid and unpaid work, by sex. Available at: <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54757> (Accessed on 30 October 2020).

#### BOX 8.12 Key Arguments: Women and unpaid work

From cooking and cleaning, to fetching water and firewood, or taking care of children and the elderly, women carry out at least two and a half times more unpaid household and care work than men. As a result, they have less time to engage in paid labour, or work longer hours, combining paid and unpaid labour. Women's unpaid work subsidizes the cost of care that sustains families, supports economies, and often fills in for the lack of social services. Yet, it is rarely recognized as 'work'. Unpaid care and domestic work is valued at between 10 and 39 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product and can contribute more to the economy than the manufacturing, commerce, or transportation sectors. With the onslaught of climate change, women's unpaid work in farming, gathering water and fuel is only likely to increase.

##### UN Women (2020b)

gender approach to an established mainstream theory which seeks to mould the gender view according to its own priorities (Steans 2013).

What is the standing of feminism in IR? Most feminist scholars consider the 'infiltration' of feminism into IR a successfully completed operation. Already in the late 1990s, V. Spike Peterson was able to claim the 'remarkable success' of IR feminists (1998: 587); in 2007, Judith Squires and Jutta Weldes also pronounced feminist IR a success (see Box 8.13).

Gender studies in relation to IR now have a substantial presence at international IR conferences. The annual meetings of the International Studies Association are an example. A large number of papers invoke a gender perspective in relation to politics,

**BOX 8.13 Key Theories: Feminism and IR**

Gendered analyses of international relations have developed a confidence that enables them to move beyond the margins of the discipline of IR to make a distinctive contribution to the study of things international . . . young scholars trained within a British IR context, display the vibrancy and sophistication of contemporary gendered work and mark a distinctive coming of age of 'Gender and International Relations' (GIR) . . . GIR scholars are now actively reconstructing IR without reference to what the mainstream asserts rightly belongs inside the discipline. In so doing they show that it is more effective to refuse to engage in the disciplinary navel-gazing inspired by positivist epistemological angst . . . When I/international R/relations is coupled with gender, the resulting GIR quite dramatically expands the substantive concerns of IR, adding significant areas of inquiry to IR's traditional focus on co-operation and conflict under anarchy.

**Squires and Weldes (2007: 185)**

economics, security, institutions, war and peace, transnational relations, terrorism, national identities, development, the drug trade, and so on. In this new generation of research, there is more going on than the simple addition of a gender focus on areas of study that otherwise remain unchanged. The gender perspective helps to develop and reconceptualize these existing concerns in new ways (Squires and Weldes 2007: 189).

One example in this regard is the study by Lauren Wilcox, 'Gendering the Cult of the Offensive' (Wilcox 2009). Existing studies have shown that states often perceive themselves to be in a much more insecure situation than they really are. In particular, they tend to exaggerate the dangers they face, which leads to overly belligerent responses. Feminism can be of great help in understanding the causes of this syndrome, according to Wilcox. Her study is not primarily concerned with the status of women; it rather employs the concept of gender 'to analyze the workings of power through gendered discourses and identities' (see Box 8.14).

**BOX 8.14 Key Arguments: Gender and belligerence**

Gendered perceptions of technology, gendered discourses of nationalism, and the protection racket are three related ways in which offensive wars may be legitimated and thus enabled . . . By explaining the impact gender has on issues related to the perception of offense–defense balance, feminist analysis shows how gender discourses and the production of gender identities are not confined to individuals and the private realm but rather are a pervasive fact of social life on an international scale. International relations theorists concerned with determining the causes of war would do well to consider the ways in which gender can shape the conditions under which wars occur.

**Wilcox (2009: 240)**

It should also be noted that there is a vibrant debate about methodological approaches to the study of security with a significant number of feminist contributions. They include Jennifer Maruska's (2017) analysis of feminist ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, and methods in IR, Stefan Borg's (2018) discussion of genealogy as critique in international relations (see also Srdjan (2011), Lauren Wilcox's (2016) discussion of methods in critical security studies, and Hansen (2000)).

This development can be seen as a fruitful move towards better integrating feminist IR into the larger debate of the discipline. Together with other post-positivist approaches, feminism is now less a marginal voice and more of a set of acknowledged approaches with a common starting point. But many post-positivists will argue that there is still a clear hierarchy in the discipline where such approaches, including feminism, are kept at the margins.

## 8.5 Critique of Post-positivist Approaches

A major critique of post-positivist approaches concerns methodology. Post-positivists are unhappy with positivist methodology; positivists maintain that the scientific method they employ is superior. Behind these views are different understandings of the nature of the social world (**ontology**) and of the relation of our knowledge to that world. The ontology issue is raised by the following question: is there an objective reality 'out there' or is the world one of experience only; i.e., a subjective creation of people (Oakeshott 1966)? The extreme objectivist position is purely naturalist and materialist; i.e., international relations are basically a thing, an object, out there. The extreme subjectivist position is purely idealist; i.e., international relations are basically an idea or concept that people share about how they should organize themselves and relate to each other politically—it is constituted exclusively by language, ideas, and concepts.

The **epistemology** issue is raised by the following question: in what way can we obtain knowledge about the world? At one extreme is the notion of scientifically explaining the world. The task is to build a valid social science on a foundation of verifiable empirical propositions. At the other extreme is the notion of understanding the world; that is, to comprehend and interpret the substantive topic under study. According to this view, historical, legal, or moral problems of world politics cannot be translated into terms of science without misunderstanding them.

Scholars of a positivist leaning criticize post-positivists for what they see as a lack of scientific method. For example, Robert Keohane (1998) suggests that feminists should pursue a research programme based on that method or approach. This would involve formulating hypotheses and collecting the necessary data to test these hypotheses in order to falsify or validate them. That would be, according to Keohane, 'the best way to convince non-believers of the validity of the message that feminists are seeking to deliver' (1998: 196). Even Jackson (2016: 205–7), who—as we have explained—strongly defends a pluralist position to methodology in IR, urges post-positivists, whom he terms reflexivists, to move on from mainly criticizing established theories and approaches to instead formulate a more positive (not to be confused with positivist) methodological position.

Post-positivists mostly reject taking that course. In doing so, they make two arguments. First, social science, including IR, must necessarily work with a plurality of approaches that use different ways of obtaining knowledge about the world. There is no 'single standard of methodological correctness' (Tickner 2005: 3) that can be applied across the board (see also Jackson 2016). Second, post-positivist approaches to scholarship have already been able to question the established truths as they appear in mainstream theorizing and they have been able to formulate a larger number of new critiques and different insights. The whole purpose of post-positivist scholarship is to avoid being boxed into a conventional approach. At the same time, to a considerable extent post-positivist scholars have in fact attempted to devise their own methodological positions, see, for example, the feminist contributions to the development of methodologies in security studies mentioned in section 8.4.

In recent years, the discipline of IR has moved towards a less confrontationist view of methodology. Many scholars strive to avoid extreme positions in the debate. They seek out a middle ground which avoids a stark choice between 'positivist' and 'post-positivist' methodology. The option for the middle ground is contained already in Max Weber's (1964: 88) definition of 'sociology' as 'a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects'. Weber is saying that scholars must emphatically understand the world in order to carry out their research into social phenomena. He is also saying, however, that that does not prevent scholars from framing hypotheses in order to test empirical theories that seek to explain social phenomena. We need explanation as well as understanding because the world is made up of both material forces 'out there' and social understandings, ideas, and perceptions 'in here'. Both elements must be included in our analysis (Sørensen 2008b).

This is a road towards 'combining methods and critically reflecting on which of them are the most useful tools for designing and implementing research' (Tickner 2005: 19). Many scholars from both the 'positivist' and 'post-positivist' side of the fence support that eclectic position today; but not all. Steve Smith, for example, maintains that different theories see the world differently and tell dissimilar stories about it that cannot be freely combined because of the intimate connection between knowledge and power (Smith 2008; see Box 8.2). 'Eclecticists' will retort that even if this is the case, a large amount of theoretical cooperation in the 'middle ground' remains possible; many scholars have demonstrated the advantages of an 'eclecticist' approach to theorizing (Sil and Katzenstein 2010).

There is another potential problem connected with Steve Smith's view. It ultimately proposes that the value of any theory is based on political values (the Foucauldian 'no "truth" outside of power' perspective). If IR theory is mainly politics in disguise, then any theory must be as good as any other theory because we are left with no neutral way of deciding which theory is best academically. Academic debates are really political debates in disguise. If theory is always an expression of political interest rather than academic curiosity, political science is neither science nor scholarship: it is politics; and in politics 'anything goes'.

Most scholars would not go that far. They accept the insight that no knowledge is completely value-free; but even if that is the case, there is a difference between pure politics

and the academic undertaking of understanding and explaining international relations. That academic enterprise does not take place in complete isolation from or ignorance of politics, but it does attempt to come up with systematic and detached analysis. Academic knowledge is bound by common standards of clarity of exposition and documentation. Put differently, such knowledge is compelled to demonstrate that it is not the result of wishful thinking, guesswork, or fantasy; it must contain more than purely subjective evaluations (Brecht 1963: 113–16).

On that basis, some academic work is better than other academic work; it is not a case of ‘anything goes’. Inspired by Max Weber, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2016: 26) formulates a minimum definition of science as a ‘systematic inquiry designed to produce factual knowledge’. Most post-positivists would agree to this but they would emphasize that one theory is no better than any other merely by virtue of being based, for example, on positivist assumptions about the world.

We have spent some time on methodology because that has been an important issue in the debate about post-positivist approaches. But there has also been critique of the substantial analyses made by these scholars. Take Said’s analysis of the intellectual dominance of the West in the analysis of the Orient. He claims that the West is not really interested in the many rich nuances of the Oriental world. However, his own analysis similarly reduces the West to a caricature that stands for imperialism and ethnocentrism and nothing else. Said is not himself interested in the rich nuances of the Western world and, ironically, he does not offer better analytical ways to bring forward the rich reality of the Orient (Valbjørn 2008b).

This can be seen as a more general critique of some post-positivist approaches: they tend to reduce their opponent’s theory, and view of the world, to a straw man easy to destroy. In some postcolonial thinking this involves a tendency to see ‘everything bad’ as coming from the colonizing West. This corresponds with the view of radical dependency theory (see Chapter 10) when it criticizes Western modernization thinking for the opposite view: that ‘everything good’ comes from the West. Both views are wrong; the real world is more complex and differentiated than that. A one-way critique is always in danger of missing out something important.

## 8.6 The Post-positivist Research Programme

It is not possible to succinctly outline a post-positivist research programme, because post-positivism comprises a large number of different theories and approaches that move in different directions. On top of this, both postcolonial and feminist IR scholarship contain several different theoretical strands, as we noted earlier. What can be said with some certainty is that post-positivism today contains two major elements; one is the continued critical analysis and deconstruction of established, positivist theories that claim too much for themselves and present narrow, one-sided and ideologically biased views of the world. The other is the substantial development of post-positivist analyses in a large number of areas and the advance of post-positivist methodologies.

A major item in coming years concerns the extent to which post-positivists will continue to cast themselves as outsiders on the margins of the discipline or whether they

**BOX 8.15** Key Arguments: Fragmentation of IR

We are now an IR of camps that form around, and develop particularistic notions of, the international and its key relations. Camps follow particular personages and texts, often interact minimally with one another, and can be unfamiliar with texts and theories that do not concern them; increasingly, the camps even develop their own journals . . . In some ways, this means that IR is at an end: there is little agreement today on what the field is about.

**Sylvester (2007: 551)**

will more actively seek links and cooperate with other theories and approaches in the ‘middle ground’ we talked about in the previous section (for an analysis, see Eun 2017). In any case, post-positivism has contributed significantly towards making the discipline of IR more pluralistic, with a number of different theories to choose from that reflect dissimilar social, political, and cultural positions; it has certainly also helped shed a critical light on the assumptions and commitments of established theories. The ‘rediscovery’ of IR theories and perspectives coming to the field from non-Western countries and cultures (Tickner and Wæver 2009; Tickner and Blaney 2012) further adds to this pluralism.

Radically increasing pluralism also means that IR is becoming less of a coherent discipline and more of a fragmented undertaking divided into different camps that do not always listen to each other (see Box 8.15 and Dunne, Hansen, and Wight 2013). There are no longer theories in the discipline that are undisputedly hegemonic. When there are no leading theories, there can be no great debates. What we have instead is a significant amount of ongoing reflections emerging from a large number of different camps. In that way, the consequence of pluralism is more confusion. The optimistic take on this is that confusion is the necessary by-product of a rich and nuanced analysis of international affairs.

## 8.7 Integrating International and Domestic Factors

The distinction between international and domestic, between inside and outside, is a core concern, especially for post-structuralists. That is because inside/outside distinctions are critically involved in establishing identities, and identities are related to power and to what we believe is good or bad. Conventional theory takes sovereignty and the distinction between ‘us in here’ and ‘them out there’ for granted. Post-structuralists want to interrogate the processes of identity creation, not take them for granted (Campbell and Bleiker 2020: 207). In other words, the domestic/international distinction is a matter of ongoing historical creation as is the establishment of a ‘national identity’. For example, the ‘war on terror’ discourse after 2001 promoted a notion of ‘American family’ with ‘the positioning of a masculine and “Western” (read as “white”) US against an “Eastern Other”’ (Khalid 2017: Ch. 4). In sum, the post-structuralist take on the



domestic/international distinction is the deconstruction of binaries in order to lay bare the processes of power and exclusion upon which they are founded.

At the same time, post-positivist approaches all emphasize the importance of human action. It is humans, after all, who exercise power by imposing particular descriptions on reality. It is their identities and discourses that are the objects of analysis. It is certainly clear that in a world characterized by rather unorthodox international actors such as Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, the need for critical analysis of speech acts has been on the increase, perhaps especially in situations of extraordinary circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further, conventional analyses, such as those based on realism, tend to emphasize material power resources in their discussions of global affairs and world order. But it has become abundantly clear that material power is only part of the picture. In material terms, the United States remains the leading power in the world by a significant margin (Sørensen 2016). But under the Trump presidency, the US has significantly withdrawn from global leadership (Daalder and Lindsay 2018; Patrick 2020), a development that began during the Obama period. That is, we are still in a situation of preponderant American power in material terms, but this is simultaneously a situation of absence of US leadership, even to the extent that ‘the rest of the world is laughing at Trump’ (Applebaum 2020). President Biden claims an ambition of restoring US leadership, but he has not moved very far in that direction by late 2021.

That calls for an increased focus on what major actors say and do; it also brings to attention the development and contestation of identities: are we primarily members of a global community of human beings, are we primarily nationals (‘my country first’), or something else? Identities and speech acts are of prime importance, also for the constitution of inside and outside, and post-positivists were already aware of that at a very early point. Their analyses will surely continue to be in demand.

## \* Key points

- Post-positivist approaches is an umbrella term for a variety of contemporary issues in the study of IR. What unites them is dissatisfaction with the established theoretical traditions in the discipline, in particular with neorealism, which is seen as the dominant conventional theory. In their critique of established traditions, post-positivist scholars raise both methodological and substantial issues.
- Three of the most important post-positivist approaches are: post-structuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism.
- Post-structuralism is focused on language and discourse; it adopts a critical attitude towards established approaches in that it highlights the ways in which these theories represent and discuss the world. It is particularly critical of neorealism because of its one-sided focus on (Northern) states. Neorealism presents a world where a variety of actors (e.g., women, the poor, groups in the South, protest movements) and processes (e.g., exploitation, subordination, environmental degradation) are not identified and analysed. Neorealism, therefore, constructs a biased picture of the world that needs to be exposed and criticized.

- Postcolonialism adopts a post-structural attitude in order to understand the situation in areas that were conquered by Europe, in particular in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. When Western scholars talk about 'traditional' and 'underdeveloped' countries, they are really constructing certain images of these areas that reflect how the powerful dominate and organize the ways in which states in the South are perceived and discussed. Any real liberation of the South thus needs to critically expose such images; only in that way can the road be paved for really democratic and egalitarian relationships.
- Feminism underlines that women are a disadvantaged group in the world, in both material terms and in terms of a value system that favours men over women. A gender-sensitive perspective on IR investigates the inferior position of women in the international political and economic system and analyses how our current ways of thinking about IR tend to disguise as well as to reproduce a gender hierarchy.
- Post-positivism has contributed significantly to making the discipline of IR more pluralistic with a number of different theories to choose from that reflect dissimilar social, political, and cultural positions; it has certainly also helped shed a critical light on the assumptions and commitments of established theories. This also means that IR is becoming less of a coherent discipline and more of a fragmented undertaking divided into different camps that do not always listen to each other.

## ? Questions

- Identify the major post-positivist approaches.
- Why are post-positivists dissatisfied with positivist methodology?
- Outline the substantial contributions that post-positivist analyses make to the study of IR.
- 'There can be no "objective" observation' says Steve Smith. Discuss.
- What is the relationship between knowledge and power, according to post-positivists?
- Is the discipline of IR dissolving into different camps that have little to say to each other?
- What is the dominant discourse on gender issues in your country? How does it influence political practice?
- What is the key aim of the research agenda of Global IR? To what extent has it been successful in recent decades?
- Post-positivists have been challenged to formulate an explicit methodology. What are the objections against this call for scientific stringency? Are these objections valid?



## Guide to further reading

- Acharya, A. (2014). 'Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds'. *International Studies Quarterly*, 58/4: 647–59.
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- Tickner, A. B. and Smith, K. (2020). *International Relations from the Global South*. London: Routledge.

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## PART 3

# Theory Meets the Real World: Policy and Issues

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# CHAPTER 9

## Foreign Policy

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### Summary

This chapter addresses theories and approaches involved in **foreign policy analysis**. Foreign policy analysis is the study of the management of external relations and activities of nation-states, as distinguished from their domestic policies. The chapter is organized as follows: first, the concept of **foreign policy** is outlined. Next, various approaches to foreign policy analysis are discussed. The arguments of major theories are introduced using a **'level-of-analysis' approach** that addresses the international system level, the nation-state level, and the level of the individual decision maker (see Box 9.1). A case-study on the Gulf War demonstrates how insights from various approaches to foreign policy analysis can be brought together, and concludes with comments on the limits of such knowledge. Finally, a note on Donald Trump and US foreign policy serves to illustrate some of the chapter's main arguments.

## 9.1 The Concept of Foreign Policy

Foreign policy analysis is the study of the management of external relations and activities of nation-states, as distinguished from their domestic policies. Foreign policy involves goals, strategies, measures, methods, guidelines, directives, understandings, agreements, and so on, by which national governments conduct international relations with each other and with international organizations and non-governmental actors. All national governments, by the very fact of their separate international existence, are obliged to engage in foreign policy directed at foreign governments and other international actors. Governments want to influence the goals and activities of other actors whom they cannot completely control because they exist and operate beyond their sovereignty (Carlsnaes 2013: 298–326).

Foreign policies consist of aims and measures that are intended to guide government decisions and actions with regard to external affairs, particularly relations with foreign countries. Managing foreign relations calls for carefully considered plans of action that are adapted to foreign interests and concerns—i.e., goals—of the government. Government officials in leading positions—presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, defence ministers, finance ministers, and so on, along with their closest advisors—are usually the key policymakers.

### BOX 9.1 Key Arguments: Foreign policy analysis (FPA): A separate toolbox?

Can foreign policies be analysed with the theories of international relations introduced in this book or do we need theories that are specifically designed for this? This is a contentious question in the literature. According to Kenneth Waltz (1979), a theory of international politics cannot be used to make sense of foreign policies, which are the product of domestic factors (see Box 3.9 in Chapter 3). Likewise, many students of foreign policy eschew the broader theories of international relations to focus on actors and the characteristics of foreign policy decision-making processes. However, most scholars hold that a number of theories of international relations have direct implications for either the constraints placed on foreign policy decision makers or the way these policies are formulated, and that they therefore make up a crucial part of the toolbox of foreign policy analysis (see Beach and Pedersen 2020: 4–5; Carlsnaes 2013: 308). Even system-level theories can ‘be used to explain the broad trends in state goals that are due to a state’s placement in the international system’ (Beach and Pedersen 2020: 71). For instance, the offensive neorealism of Mearsheimer can be used to make different predictions about foreign policies than the defensive neorealism of Waltz (Carlsnaes 2013: 308–9). At the same time, foreign policy decisions are made by human beings, not by anonymous structures. FPA puts the interplay between human agents and structures into focus (Hudson and Day 2020: 1–28) and that is an enrichment of IR theory. In this chapter, we therefore introduce a broad array of theories, including both general theories of international relations and more specific theories of foreign policy decision-making processes.



Policymaking involves a means–end way of thinking about goals and actions of government. It is an instrumental concept: what is the problem or goal and which solutions or approaches are available to address it? Instrumental analysis involves thinking of the best available decision or course of action—e.g., giving correct advice—to make things happen according to one’s requirements or interests. The analyst seeks to provide knowledge that is of some relevance to the policymaker. It involves calculating the measures and methods that will most likely enable him or her to reach a goal, and the costs and benefits of different available policy options. It may extend to recommending the best course to enable a government to solve its foreign policy problems or achieve its foreign policy goals. At that point policy analysis becomes not only instrumental but also prescriptive: it advocates what ought to be done.

## 9.2 Foreign Policy Analysis

Foreign policy analysis ordinarily involves scrutinizing the external policies of states and placing them in a broader context of academic knowledge. That academic context is usually defined by theories and approaches—such as the ones discussed in previous chapters. The relationship between theory and policy does not necessarily lead to any one clear policy option; in most cases there will be several different options. Even so, the choice of theory—how policymakers view the world—is likely to affect the choice of policy.

That is partly because different theories are based on different vantage points. Realists underline the value of national security: enhancing national military power and balancing that of other states form the correct way of achieving national security. International Society scholars emphasize the values of order and justice: a rule-based and well-ordered international society is a major goal. Freedom and democracy are the core values for liberals: they are convinced that liberal democracies will support peaceful international cooperation based on international institutions. Finally, scholars who emphasize the importance of socioeconomic wealth and welfare as a central goal of foreign policy are likely to take an IPE approach. For them, the promotion of a stable international economic system that can support economic growth and welfare progress is a major goal. It should be noted, however, that some of these theories are more policy-oriented than others.

Foreign policy theorists who are concerned with defence or security issues are likely to take a **realist approach**, emphasizing the inevitable clash of interests between state actors, the outcomes of which are seen to be determined by relative state power. On the other hand, those concerned with multilateral questions are likely to take a **liberal approach**, emphasizing international institutions—such as the United Nations or the World Trade Organization (WTO)—as a means of reducing international conflict and promoting mutual understanding and common interests.

In addition to the general IR theories discussed in previous chapters, there are various approaches that are specific to foreign policy analysis. Some approaches are derived from IR theories. Some are adapted from other disciplines, such as economics or social psychology. Policy analysis approaches are evident not only in academic scholarship



### BOX 9.2 Key Theories: Approaches to foreign policy analysis

1. traditional approach: focus on the decision maker
2. comparative foreign policy: behaviouralism and 'pre-theory'
3. the rational actor model (RAM)
4. bureaucratic structures and processes; decision-making during crisis
5. cognitive processes and psychology
6. 'multilevel, multidimensional'; the general theories
7. the constructivist turn: identities before interests.

but also in advocacy think tanks and the analyses of experts associated with them. Box 9.2 presents major approaches to foreign policy analysis; they are explained in what follows.

1. A **traditional approach to foreign policy** analysis involves being informed about a government's external policies: knowing their history or at least their background; comprehending the interests and concerns that drive the policies; and thinking through the various ways of addressing and defending those interests and concerns. That includes knowing the outcomes and consequences of past foreign policy decisions and actions. It also involves an ability to recognize the circumstances under which a government must operate in carrying out its foreign policy. In addition, the traditional approach involves the exercise of judgement and common sense in assessing the best practical means and courses of action available for carrying out foreign policies.

In this sense, traditional theories focus on actors and their decisions in a way that theories of international relations seldom do (Beach and Pedersen 2020: 13). That 'feel' for what is possible under the circumstances is usually derived from experience. It could be said that a satisfactory grasp of a country's foreign policy is best achieved by direct knowledge of its government's foreign affairs; e.g., by serving in a foreign ministry or similar government agency. The next best thing would involve trying to put oneself into the mindset of such an official: attempting to grasp the circumstances of such a person; endeavouring to understand the reasons such an official arrived at a decision; and trying to ascertain its consequences, both good and bad. In short, traditional foreign policy study is a matter of gaining insight into the activity of foreign policymakers, either from experience or by careful scrutiny of past and present foreign policies. It was, accordingly, a body of wisdom and insights which could only be acquired by lengthy study and reflection. The main writers on the subject were historians, jurists, and philosophers. Some were practitioners as well, such as Machiavelli and Grotius at an early period in modern history, and George Kennan and Henry Kissinger in a later period. Their commentaries on foreign policy attempted to distil that wisdom and those insights. The approach continues to appeal to historically minded International Society scholars and classical realists, because it gets into the detailed substance of foreign policy. It is cautious of allowing theory to get ahead of practice and experience.

2. The **comparative approach to foreign policy** was inspired by the behaviouralist turn (see Chapter 2) in political science. The ambition was to build systematic theories and explanations of the foreign policy process in general. This was to be achieved by gathering and amalgamating large bodies of data, and by describing the content and context of the foreign policy of a large number of countries (Lantis and Beasley 2017; Brummer and Hudson 2015). It was theoretically informed by James Rosenau's (1966) 'pre-theory' of foreign policy. Rosenau identified numerous possibly relevant sources of foreign policy decisions and grouped them into five categories, which he called: idiosyncratic, role, governmental, societal, and systemic variables. He then proposed a ranking of the relative importance of these variables, depending on the issue at hand and on the attributes of the state (e.g., size, political accountability/level of democracy, level of development). A large number of empirical studies of foreign policy employed Rosenau's scheme, but the 'pre-theory' never emerged as a clear explanation of foreign policy; it remained a classification scheme.

3. The **rational actor model (RAM) of foreign policy** holds that decision makers implement rational policies that maximize gains at minimum cost. As the name says, this approach is based on the assumption that actors are rational and have the necessary information to make informed choices; it takes the individual actors out of the analysis by turning them into automatons who do the bidding of rational choice (Horowitz et al. 2015: 18). RAM is therefore best seen as a baseline for analysing foreign policies. The analyst can ask how close to the predictions of the rational actor model the characteristics and outcome of specific foreign policy decision-making processes have been and use the aspects that are not accounted for to make the case for alternative theories. The rationality assumption can also be imported as the mechanism that translates the systemic pressure described by broader theories of international relations, such as versions of neorealism or liberalism, into specific foreign policies (Beach and Pedersen 2020: 144–6).

4. The **bureaucratic structures and processes approach to foreign policy** focuses on the organizational context of decision-making, which is seen to be conditioned by the dictates and demands of the bureaucratic settings in which decisions are made. Analysing processes and channels whereby organizations arrive at their policies is seen to be a superior way of obtaining empirical knowledge of foreign policy. The strength of the bureaucratic politics approach is its empiricism: its detailed attention to the concrete way policies are carried out in the bureaucratic milieus within which policymakers work. The approach seeks to find out not only what happened but also why it happened the way it did.

The best-known study of this kind is Graham Allison's book on the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, *Essence of Decision* (Allison 1971; Allison and Zelikow 1999). The analysis suggests three different and complementary ways of understanding American decision-making during that crisis: (1) the 'rational actor approach' described above that provides models for answering the question: based on the available information what would be the best decision to reach one's goal? The assumption is that governments are unified and rational; they want to achieve well-defined foreign policy goals. (2) An 'organizational processes' model, according to which a concrete foreign policy emerges from clusters of governmental organizations that look after their own best interests

and follow 'standard operating procedures'. (3) A 'bureaucratic politics model' which portrays individual decision makers as bargaining and competing for influence, each with their own particular goals in mind. Despite criticism (Bendor and Hammond 1992; see also Hudson and Day 2020: 75–122), Allison's three models have informed much research on foreign policy.

5. The **cognitive processes and psychology approach** also focused on the individual decision maker, this time with particular attention to the psychological aspects of decision-making, such as perceptions of actors. These perspectives reject the strong rationality assumption of RAM and instead see decision makers as, at most, acting rationally within certain constraints placed by the limits of human cognition (see Beach and Pedersen 2020: 147–8). For instance, Robert Jervis (1968; 1976) studied misperception: why do actors mistake or misunderstand the intentions and actions of others? Jervis gives several reasons: actors see what they want to see instead of what is really going on; they are guided by ingrained, pre-existing beliefs (e.g., the tendency to perceive other states as more hostile than they really are); and they engage in 'wishful thinking'. Another example in this category is the work of Margaret Herman (1984; see also Hudson and Day 2020: 39–75). She studied the personality characteristics of fifty-four heads of government, making the claim that such factors as the leaders' experience in foreign affairs, their political styles, their political socialization, and their broader views of the world should all be taken into account to understand their foreign policy behaviour.

6. The **'multilevel and multidimensional approach'** was developed over the last several decades, as it became increasingly clear that there would never be one all-encompassing theory of foreign policy, just as there is not one consolidated theory of IR. Many scholars now study particular aspects of foreign policymaking using the various major theories presented in Part 2 of this book. Studies of balance of power behaviour and of deterrence and security dilemmas—both realist approaches—are examples of that. Thomas Schelling's strategic realism, which was derived from game theory (see Chapter 3), focuses directly on foreign policy decision-making. It was applied most successfully in strategic studies during the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in a struggle involving nuclear weapons (Schelling 1980 [1960]).

As indicated in Chapter 4, liberals study complex interdependence, the role of international institutions, processes of integration, and paths of democratization. In the liberal view, all of these elements contribute in their separate ways to foreign policies that are more orientated towards peaceful cooperation for mutual benefit. For instance, an international system with many international organizations is likely to ease cooperation and hence mitigate the worst aspects of anarchy (Keohane 1984; Beach and Pedersen 2020: 91–3; see Chapter 4). International Society scholars (Chapter 5) trace the three traditions (realism, rationalism, and revolutionism) in the thought and behaviour of statespeople and ponder their consequences for foreign policy. In IPE (see Chapter 6 and 10), neo-Marxists focus on the relationship between core and periphery, and they identify the vulnerable position of underdeveloped, peripheral states in relation to developed core states as the basic explanation of their lack of room for manoeuvre in foreign policy.

7. A focus on the role of ideas, discourse, and identity is characteristic of a **social constructivist approach** to foreign policy analysis (see Chapter 7). Constructivists see foreign

policymaking as an intersubjective world, whose ideas and discourse can be scrutinized in order to arrive at a better theoretical understanding of that process. They trace the influence of ideas and the discourse of policymakers on the processes and outcomes in foreign policy—since many actions are conveyed by speech and writing (Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Houghton 2007). ‘Strategic culture’ is an example of the influence of ideas. Over time, countries tend to develop a more lasting set of ideas about how they want to go about using military force in conducting foreign affairs; this set of ideas is the strategic culture (Johnston 1995). A more ambitious version of constructivism is not satisfied with the notion of ideas as one among several factors influencing foreign policy. These constructivists claim that identity, rooted in ideas and discourse, is the basis for a definition of interests and thus lies behind any foreign policy. Some constructivists focus on domestic sources of ideas and identities (Hopf 2002); others concentrate on how the dialogue and discourse of states affect their mutual relations (Wendt 1999; see also Jung 2019; Hudson and Day 2020: 3–16).

### 9.3 How to Study Foreign Policy: A Level-of-Analysis Approach

The different theories and approaches briefly identified in the previous section can all be of some assistance in the analysis of foreign policy. It will not be possible to present all of them in detail here; simplification is necessary. We propose to demonstrate the arguments of major theories by using a level-of-analysis approach. As described in Chapter 2, the level-of-analysis approach was introduced by Kenneth Waltz in his study of the causes of war (Waltz 1959; see also Singer 1961 and Asal, Miller, and Willis 2020). Waltz searched for the causes of war at three different levels of analysis: the level of the individual (are human beings aggressive by nature?); the level of the state (are some states more prone to conflict than others?); and the level of the system (are there conditions in the international system that lead states towards war?). We can study foreign policy at these same three levels of analysis:

- the systemic level (e.g., the distribution of power among states in the international system; their political and economic interdependence);
- the nation-state level (e.g., type of government, democratic or authoritarian; relations between the state apparatus and groups in society; the bureaucratic make-up of the state apparatus);
- the level of the individual decision maker (his/her way of thinking, basic beliefs, personal experiences and priorities).

#### 9.3.1 The Systemic Level

Theories at the systemic level explain foreign policy by pointing to conditions in the international system that compel or pressure states towards acting in certain ways; that is, to follow a certain foreign policy. Therefore, systemic theories first need to say something

about the conditions that prevail in the international system; they then need to create a plausible connection between those conditions and the actual foreign policy behaviour of states. As we have seen in previous chapters, the various theories of the international system are not in full agreement about the conditions that primarily characterize the system. Realists focus on anarchy and the competition between states for power and security; liberals find more room for cooperation because of international institutions, economic interdependence, and a common desire by states for progress and prosperity. For many social constructivists, the goals of states are not decided beforehand; they are shaped by the ideas and values that come forward in the process of discourse and interaction between states (Wendt 1992; 1999; Kratochwil 2017). For present purposes, these different views of the international system can be summarized as shown in Table 9.1.

So different theories of the international system lead to different ideas about how states will behave. However, even if we agree on one of these theories, it remains complicated to get from the general description of the system to specific foreign policies by states. Let us focus on realism; it proclaims a post-Cold War resurgence of great-power competition in an anarchic world where states compete for power and security. This would appear to be accurate in the broad sense, for example, US foreign policy ‘is generally consistent with realist principles, insofar as its actions are still designed to preserve US predominance and to shape a post-war order that advances American interests’ (Walt 1998: 37).

How exactly do anarchy and self-help in the system lead to a certain aspect of US foreign policy? For neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz or Stephen Krasner, the basic factor

TABLE 9.1 Three conceptions of the international system			
	REALISM	LIBERALISM	CONSTRUCTIVISM
Main theoretical proposition	Anarchy. States compete for power and security	Self-interest does not preclude cooperation under anarchy; mutual liberal values can foster cooperation	Collective norms and social identities shape behaviour
Main instruments of policy	Military and economic power	Institutions, liberal values, networks of interdependence	Ideas and discourse
Post-Cold War prediction	Resurgence of great-power competition	Increased cooperation as economic interdependence, international institutions, and liberal values spread	Agnostic: depends on content of ideas
Significantly modified version of Walt (1998: 174)			

explaining state behaviour is the distribution of power among states. With a bipolar distribution of power, the two competing states are compelled to 'balance against' each other and thus to become rivals:

Britain was bound to balance against Germany in the First and Second World Wars because Germany was the one state that had the potential to dominate the continent and thereby pose a threat to the British Isles . . . Realism is less analytically precise when the international system is not tightly constraining. A hegemonic state, for instance, does not have to be concerned with its territorial and political integrity, because there is no other state . . . that can threaten it.

**(Krasner 1992: 39–40)**

In the absence of constraints, the balance of power will be less helpful in understanding the leading state's foreign policy. According to Stephen Krasner, 'it may be necessary to introduce other arguments, such as domestic social purpose or bureaucratic interests. A realist explanation always starts with the international distribution of power but it may not be able to end there' (1992: 41). In Chapter 3, we described how Kenneth Waltz argues that to explain foreign policy, his neorealism needs help outside of the theory itself: it needs to consider what goes on inside states. This point has arguably been especially important in the decades after the Cold War where the United States has by far been the predominant power and has not been particularly constrained by other states or groups of states in the system (Legro 2011).

It follows that there is a key difference between the foreign policy of great and small powers. Small states are much more constrained by the international system; indeed, according to realists, their foreign policy must respond to external pressure rather than domestic political concerns (see Beach and Pedersen 2020: 84). Great powers, especially in a context of multipolarity or if they themselves dominate the system as the US has since 1989, have much more leeway.

Even in cases where the balance of power is tightly constraining, however, assumptions need to be made about what it is that states want when they compete with other states. An important distinction here is between defensive and offensive realists (Brooks and Wohlforth 2008; Glaser 2010). Defensive realists, such as Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Walt, take a benign view of anarchy; states seek security more than power and they are therefore normally status quo preserving. Offensive realists, such as John Mearsheimer, believe that states 'look for opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals, and to take advantage of those situations when the anticipated benefits outweigh the costs. A state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system' (Mearsheimer 2001: 21). For defensive realists, states are generally satisfied with the prevailing balance of power when it safeguards their security; for offensive realists, states are always apprehensively looking to increase their relative power position in the system. It is clear that different foreign policies can follow from adopting either the defensive or the offensive assumption.

For instance, the ongoing 'rise of China' is bound to have different foreign policy repercussions based on these two perspectives. According to defensive realists, as

long as American survival is not in jeopardy, the US will not necessarily respond to the increase in Chinese military and economic capabilities. It might be more prudent to recognize or accommodate Chinese power, and some defensive realists will argue that the emergence of new bipolarity between the US and China could well stabilize the international system. According to offensive realists, the US is almost bound to clash with a rising China as each wishes to be hegemon. Whether one subscribes to the defensive or offensive position, different expectations about American (and for that matter Chinese) foreign policy follow. Further specification of expectations can be introduced within each of these two realist perspectives. For instance, Stephen Walt presents a more elaborate defensive realism than Waltz's, where states balance not power in general but threats in particular (see Chapter 3). This distinction explains why the US responds to North Korean power but not to British or French power. Once again, the devil is in the detail: the finer nuances of realist theories have consequences for the goals states are likely to pursue, given a particular international constellation of power. This is also demonstrated by Mearsheimer's current position which is more focused on building an order that 'can contain Chinese expansion' (Mearsheimer 2019: 50).

Liberals, though most of them accept the staying power of international anarchy, derive different foreign policy goals from the systemic level. As mentioned in Chapter 4, there are two strands of liberal theory that operate solely at the systemic level: interdependence liberalism and neoliberal institutionalism. Interdependence liberals note that international relations are becoming more like domestic politics, where 'different issues generate different coalitions, both within governments and across them, and involve different degrees of conflict. Politics does not stop at the water's edge' (Keohane and Nye 1977: 25). This increased interdependence mitigates the effects of international rivalry—anarchy is, so to speak, being domesticated—and it predisposes states to value cooperation in foreign politics. Likewise, neoliberal institutionalism argues that a system peppered by international organizations softens anarchy by easing cooperation (Keohane 1989). This occurs because institutions help solve collective action problems, e.g., by creating credible commitments between the parties in negotiations (see also Beach and Pedersen 2020: 91–3). Today, most liberals agree that the liberal order is in crisis. Interdependence and institutions can still help foster cooperation, but there is an increasing focus on retrenchment and national priorities which is combined with a rising recognition of the seriousness of transnational problems (Ikenberry, Parmar, and Stokes 2018; see also Chapters 4 and 12).

Finally, Wendt's (1992; 1999; Houghton 2007) constructivist theory also operates solely on the systemic level. The gist of the theory is that states' interests follow from the prevailing type of international system, which is itself shaped by the interaction of states. While this perspective produces indeterminate predictions about states' goals in general, an empirical analysis that establishes the prevailing type of anarchy can be used to predict states' foreign policy aims. To illustrate, if anarchy falls closer to the realist pole, power and survival will be the preferred goals; if it falls closer to the liberal pole, cooperation is more likely.



### 9.3.2 The Level of the Nation-state

A comprehensive explanation of foreign policy would have to include the level of the nation-state as well as the level of the individual decision maker. According to Kenneth Waltz:

The third image [the systemic level] describes the framework of world politics, but without the first and second images there can be no knowledge of the forces that determine policy; the first and second images [the level of the individual and the level of the nation-state] describe the forces in world politics, but without the third image it is impossible to assess their importance or predict their results.

**(Waltz 1959: 238)**

One approach is to examine the relationship between a country's state apparatus and domestic society. For some realists—those we termed classical and neoclassical realists in Chapter 3—this relationship is important because it assesses the ability of a government to mobilize and manage the country's power resources.

Foreign policy is made not by the nation as a whole but by its government. Consequently, what matters is state power, not national power. State power is that portion of national power the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which central decision makers can achieve their ends.

**(Zakaria 1998: 9)**

According to this argument, the United States may be a very powerful nation, but national power may not be at the ready disposal of the government. For long historical periods, the US was a 'weak state' facing a 'strong society'. Consequently, the government was unable to conduct an expansive and more assertive foreign policy that matched the actual power resources of the country (see Box 9.3).

This realist analysis indicates that it is not sufficient to examine the overall or systemic distribution of power. It is also necessary to examine the connection between a country's government and its society in order to properly assess the government's ability to mobilize and extract resources from society for foreign policy purposes (e.g., military expenditures, foreign aid) (see McCormick 2012). As Norrin Ripsman puts it, the responses of states 'are shaped by unit-level factors such as state-society relations, the nature of their domestic political regimes, strategic culture, and leader perceptions' (2017: 1). Schweller's (2004; 2006) theory of 'underbalancing', which we discussed in Chapter 3, is a good example.

Unlike realists, liberals believe that individuals, groups, and organizations in society play an important role in foreign policy (see Chapter 4). They not only influence or frustrate the government; they also conduct international relations (or 'foreign policies') in their own right by creating transnational relations that are an important element in international interactions between countries. Sociological liberals argue that international relations conducted by governments have been 'supplemented by relations among private individuals, groups, and societies that can and do have important consequences for the course of events' (Rosenau 1980: 1; see also Mitrani 2013). Another important



**BOX 9.3** Key Arguments: Fareed Zakaria on the US as a ‘weak state’

The decades after the Civil War saw the beginning of a long period of growth in America’s material resources. But this national power lay dormant beneath a weak state, one that was decentralized, diffuse, and divided. The presidents and their secretaries of state tried repeatedly to convert the nation’s rising power into influence abroad, but they presided over a federal state structure and a tiny central bureaucracy that could not get men or money from the state governments or from society at large . . . The 1880s and 1890s mark the beginnings of the modern American state, which emerged primarily to cope with the domestic pressures generated by industrialization . . . This transformation of state structure complemented the continuing growth of national power, and by the mid-1890s the executive branch was able to bypass Congress or coerce it into expanding American interests abroad. America’s resounding victory in the Spanish–American War crystallized the perception of increasing American power . . . America expanded dramatically in the years that followed.

**Zakaria (1998: 10–11)**

liberal theory of foreign policy stems from republican liberalism. As explained in Chapter 4, the claim is that foreign policies conducted between liberal democracies are more peaceful and law-abiding than are foreign policies involving countries that are not liberal democracies. This can be seen as a liberal theory of foreign policy: liberal democracies are based on political cultures that stem from peaceful conflict resolution. That leads to pacific relations with other democracies because democratic governments are controlled by citizens who will not advocate or support wars with other democracies.

The processes of democratization that took place in many countries at the end of the Cold War renewed the intense debate about the liberal theory of democratic peace. This gave way to a literature on *The Dark Side of Democracy* (Mann 2005), which we also touched upon in Chapter 4. Some critics claim that, on the one hand, early processes of democratization may lead to more, rather than less, conflict in the country (Vorrath and Krebs 2009; Cederman, Hug and Krebs 2010; Mansfield and Snyder 2012); others argue that ‘partial democracy’ increases the risk of both external and internal conflict (Mansfield and Snyder 1995; 2005; Hegre et al. 2001; but see Vreeland 2008). The latter view can be summarized as follows: Genuine democracies decrease the risk of internal conflict by their ability to deal with grievances via political inclusion and the provision of public goods; genuine autocracies use co-optation and repression to achieve stability. Partial democracies fall short in both respects; they do not channel public frustration in an effective way, but they still allow grievances to be aired and they are too weak to crush oppositional forces (Hegre 2014: 163; Gleditsch and Hegre 2014: 146–7). The upshot is that these regimes are generally more likely to experience internal conflict. This literature shows how scholars factor in the domestic level to understand whether states are conflict-prone or not.

Liberals thus argue that domestic politics influences foreign policies. Here, we can return to the distinction between weak and strong liberals that we made in Chapter 4. Weak liberals make somewhat timid claims about how the bottom-up processes of pluralist democracy affect the goals states pursue; strong liberals hold that there can be genuine transformations of the international system as democracy and interdependence alter the identities and interests of states (Beach and Pedersen 2020: 112–34). The more specific analyses of areas such as agricultural subsidies, exchange rates, and trade policy that have been flourishing within American IPE in recent decades (see Chapter 10) can also be seen as liberal theories of foreign policy. Compared with e.g., neoclassical realism, they explain particular policies rather than national dispositions in foreign policy more generally.

We should thus take note of a general difference in the approach of realists and liberals when it comes to foreign policy analysis focusing on the nation-state level. Realists most often see the state (i.e., the government) as a robust, autonomous unit, capable—at least most of the time—of extracting resources from society and imposing its will on society. Therefore, the analysis of foreign policy should first and foremost focus on the government of the state. Liberals, by contrast, most often see the state as a relatively weak entity which does the bidding of strong groups in society. As noted by Andrew Moravcsik, foreign policy reflects and follows the preferences of different combinations of domestic groups and individuals (see Chapter 4). Foreign policy analysis should therefore concentrate on how different groups in society not only influence, but even preside over the formulation of foreign policy. In both cases, the relationship between state and society plays a role in the analysis of foreign policy; but the realist approach is state-centred whereas the liberal approach is society-centred.

The foregoing approaches at the nation-state level of analysis focus on different types of relationships between the state (government) and society. The approaches to which we now turn focus on the decision-making process within the state apparatus. They call into question whether decisions made by states are really based on ‘rational choice’. According to the rational choice perspective, states are able to correctly identify foreign policy challenges and to make the best possible decisions in terms of benefits and costs, taking into account the goals and values of the state. This is the Rational Actor Model (RAM) of decision-making in foreign policy (Allison and Zelikow 1999; see also Morin and Paquin 2018). Is this really the way states make decisions or is it more complicated than that?

The ‘bureaucratic politics’ approach rejects the idea of bureaucratic decision-making as a rational process. Decision-making in bureaucracies is much more a process in which individuals compete for personal position and power: ‘the name of the game is politics: bargaining along regularized circuits among players positioned hierarchically within the government. Government behaviour can thus be understood . . . not as organizational outputs, but as results of these bargaining games’ (Allison 1971: 144). A study by David Kozak and James Keagle (1988; see also Michaud 2002) has identified the core characteristics of the bureaucratic politics model (see Box 9.4).

**BOX 9.4 Key Theories: The bureaucratic politics model**

- Bureaucrats and bureaucracy are driven by agency interests in order to ensure their survival.
- Agencies are involved in a constant competition for various stakes and prizes. The net effect is a policy process whereby struggles for organizational survival, expansion and growth, and imperialism are inevitable.
- Competition produces an intra-agency bureaucratic culture and behaviour pattern. The axiom 'where you stand depends on where you sit' accurately describes this condition.
- Bureaucracies have a number of advantages over elected officials in the realm of policymaking. They include expertise, continuity, responsibility for implementation, and longevity. These characteristics create an asymmetrical power and dependence relationship between the professional bureaucrats and the elected officials.
- Policy made in the arena of bureaucratic politics is characterized by bargaining, accommodation, and compromise.
- In the bureaucratic politics system, proposals for change are driven by political considerations. Bureaucracies have a deep-seated interest in self-preservation.
- By its nature, bureaucratic politics raises questions concerning control, accountability, responsiveness, and responsibility in a democratic society.

**Modified from a longer list in Kozak and Keagle (1988: 3–15)**

Critics of the bureaucratic politics model claim that it goes too far in its non-rational view of bureaucratic decision-making. Some scholars argue that decision-making during crisis is less prone to bureaucratic politics because such decisions would be made at the top level by a few key decision makers with access to the best available information. The model also downplays the role of the president in the American system. He/she is 'not just another player in a complex bureaucratic game. Not only must he ultimately decide but he also selects who the other players will be, a process that may be critical in shaping the ultimate decisions' (Holsti 2004: 24).

That brings us to the 'groupthink' approach. The term was coined by psychologist Irving Janis to describe a process by which a group arrives at faulty or irrational decisions. Janis defined groupthink as follows: 'a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action' (Janis 1982: 9). When groupthink occurs, the group fails to consider alternative ways to arrive at the best possible decision; indeed, 'the group becomes "dumber" than the individual decision-maker' (Beach and Pedersen 2020: 173). When decisions are affected by groupthink, the following shortcomings occur: the objectives are not precisely defined; alternative courses of action are not fully explored; risks involved in the preferred choice are not scrutinized; the search for information is poor; the information is processed in a biased way; and there is a failure to work out contingency plans (Janis 1982). Janis identified eight primary characteristics of groupthink (see Box 9.5).

### BOX 9.5 Key Concepts: Characteristics of groupthink

- Illusion of invulnerability: the group believes that its decision-making is beyond question, which creates excessive optimism and extreme risk taking.
- Belief in the inherent morality of the group: members ignore the moral or ethical consequences of their decisions.
- Collective rationalization: the group discounts warnings that might have otherwise led them to reconsider their assumptions before they recommit to past policy decisions.
- Out-group stereotypes: others are framed as too evil or stupid to warrant consideration of their strategies or attempts to negotiate with them.
- Self-censorship: members feel inclined to avoid deviation from consensus, and minimize the significance of their doubts and counter-arguments.
- Illusion of unanimity: partly from the silence or self-censorship, members share the belief that they are unanimous in their judgements; silence means consensus.
- Direct pressure on dissenters: challenges or sanctioning comments are made to those who express strong arguments against the group's stereotypes, illusions, or commitments; loyal members do not bring up questions.
- Self-appointed 'mindguards': these members protect the group from adverse information that might threaten the shared illusions regarding the effectiveness or morality of the group's decisions.

**Based on Janis (1982: 244)**

Several major instances of groupthink involving United States foreign policy are identified by Janis: Pearl Harbor (the US naval commanding group believed that the Japanese would never risk attacking the US; the admiral in charge joked about the idea just before it happened); the Bay of Pigs invasion (the President Kennedy group convinced itself that Castro's army was weak and its popular support shallow; objections were suppressed or overruled); the Vietnam War (the President Johnson group focused more on justifying the war than on rethinking past decisions; dissenters were ridiculed). Perhaps we can even see the failure of Western governments and health authorities, at the end of February 2020, or even into March in some cases, to recognize the danger of the spread of the COVID-19 virus from China as an instance of groupthink: despite mounting evidence to the contrary, decision makers and health experts seemed to be persuading each other that the risk of a genuine epidemic in Europe and North America was limited, only to be overtaken by the events in March as the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic became clear for everyone to see.

According to Janis, it is possible to devise a number of remedies that will avoid the negative consequences of groupthink and enhance the capabilities of groups for making better decisions (Janis 1982; see also Eder 2019 for an analysis of the Iraq war, and Hart et al. 1997). The usefulness of knowing about groupthink is not only to better explain misguided foreign policies; it is to know how to avoid them next time.

### 9.3.3 The Level of the Individual Decision Maker

When we study the general effects of systemic structures or domestic pressures on decision makers, the usual assumption we make is that of rationality, as emphasized by Robert Keohane: ‘The link between system structure and actor behaviour is forged by the rationality assumption, which enables theorists to predict that leaders will respond to the incentives and constraints imposed by their environments’ (Keohane 1986: 167). But just as bureaucracies or small groups may not always make decisions based on the rational actor model of decision-making, this applies to the level of the individual decision maker as well. Human beings have limited capacities—cognitive constraints—for conducting rational and objective decision-making. According to Ole Holsti:

the cognitive constraints on rationality include limits on the individual’s capacity to receive, process, and assimilate information about the situation; an inability to identify the entire set of policy alternatives; fragmentary knowledge about the consequences of each option; and an inability to order preferences on a single utility scale.

(Holsti 2004: 27; see also Cottam 2018)

The literature on human cognition and belief systems raises important questions which are bound to increase our scepticism about the rationality premise in foreign policy analysis:

Because the existence of threats depends on the perceptions of individuals and societies, we need to incorporate the psychological dimension of threat perception and identity formation into our more structural analyses . . . The growing attention given by neorealists to perceptual variables, the examination by neoliberals of the role of ideas, and the social constructivist focus on identity, all suggest that models operating at other levels of analysis could be strengthened by incorporating work operating at the psychological level.

(Goldgeier 1997: 164–5)

Jerel Rosati suggests four ways in which human cognition (i.e., the process of acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition, or perception) and policymaker beliefs matter (see Box 9.6).

In recent years, several fields in political science have been revolutionized by new innovations originating in behavioural psychology and behavioural economics (Axelrod

#### BOX 9.6 Key Arguments: The effects of human cognition and policymaker beliefs on foreign policy

1. through the content of policymaker beliefs
2. through the organization and structure of policymaker beliefs
3. through common patterns of perception (and misperception)
4. through cognitive rigidity (and flexibility) for change and learning.

**Quoted from Rosati (2000: 53)**

and Hamilton 1981; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993). The study of individual leaders and foreign policy is no exception. In an ambitious research project, Horowitz et al. (2015) take insights from behavioural psychology as a starting point for investigating *Why Leaders Fight*. Their key claim is that early life experiences, including upbringing, education, military service, marriage, paternity/maternity, and occupation, affect whether leaders pursue aggressive foreign policies potentially culminating in war, and how they fight military conflicts once begun:

Each of us can probably think of examples of how our own upbringing and life experiences shape the course of our daily lives. Leaders are no different. Building on evidence from developmental psychology that demonstrates how prior life experiences affect how people behave later in life, this book shows that the formative experiences of political leaders influence everything from the way they evaluate the costs and benefits of using force to the types of military grand strategies they view as most likely to be successful.

(Horowitz et al. 2015: 11)

Enlisting a new Leader Experience and Attribute Descriptions (LEAD) dataset, which maps all world leaders in the period 1875–2004 on twenty leader attributes, they report a series of findings, including:

- A past in a rebel or revolutionary movement makes leaders more likely to use violence to solve conflicts and more likely to try to get nuclear weapons: examples include Mao Zedong, Charles de Gaulle, Fidel Castro, and David Ben-Gurion.
- Leaders who have carried out military service but seen no combat are more likely to initiate and escalate military conflict than other leaders, and especially those who have personal combat experience: examples include German Kaiser Wilhelm II and US president George W. Bush.
- Older leaders are more likely to initiate military conflicts, though not in full-scale autocracies where only the ruthless reach leadership positions.
- Leaders with troubled childhoods have higher risk profiles than other leaders and are therefore more likely to start and escalate conflicts.

This is a genuine attempt to reintroduce Waltz's first image—the characteristics of individual decision-makers—into IR (see Chapters 2 and 3). It differs from what we earlier termed the 'traditional approach to foreign policy' mainly by being inspired by behaviouralism: the aim is to use behavioural psychology and quantitative data analysis to 'study individual leaders just as systematically as scholars examine other components of the international system, such as state-level variables of GDP, regime type, prior conflicts, border length, and the other variables that comprise the current, positivist conflict agenda' (Horowitz et al. 2015: 19).

Horowitz et al. (2015) concede that we need to combine Waltz's three levels to understand 'interaction between leaders, the constraints of the international system, and the constraints of domestic political institutions' (p. xii). Democratic leaders are constrained in a different way than their autocratic peers, but both face pressure from domestic groups; and nuclear weapons, geography, and foreign alliances matter for both sets of

TABLE 9.2 Eight riskiest leaders, 1875–2001

COUNTRY	LEADER
China	Deng Xiaoping
Iran	Ayatollah Khomeini
US	Ronald Reagan
Croatia	Franjo Tudjman
France	Georges Bidault
China	Mao Zedong
South Africa	Jan Smuts
Iraq	Hassan Al-Bakr

Source: Horowitz et al. (2015: 74)

leaders. Yet, by considering leader characteristics we get a more complete picture of foreign policy making: ‘it is short-sighted to claim that the theory of international conflict is fully developed when it treats state leaders as automatons’ (Horowitz et al. 2015: 186). Table 9.2 shows the eight leaders that according to the attributes included in the LEAD-dataset have been most likely to initiate military conflicts.

This is a good example of how the psychology and life experiences of leaders have again begun to be taken seriously in FPA. But taking the road of ‘cognition’ and ‘early life experiences’ instead of that of ‘rationality’ also has a potential downside. Even a somewhat comprehensive study of human cognition in world politics raises an extremely large and complex research agenda that will be very time-consuming both in terms of collecting information and in terms of analysis. Furthermore:

there is a danger that adding levels of analysis may result in an undisciplined proliferation of categories and variables. It may then become increasingly difficult to determine which are more or less important, and ad hoc explanations for individual cases erode the possibilities for broader generalization across cases.  
(Holsti 2004: 31–2)

However, many scholars are confident about the possibility of combining different theories and modes of analysis in an attempt to bring together insights from competing approaches. The following section introduces a study that attempts to do just that.

### 9.4 Going to War in the Persian Gulf: A Case-study

On 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded the small neighbouring state of Kuwait; four days later, the country was annexed as Iraq’s nineteenth province. The United States and many other states feared that Iraq would next invade oil-rich Saudi Arabia. UN resolutions condemned the invasion and demanded Iraq’s unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait.

Five months of negotiations led nowhere. Instead, a US-led military campaign to expel Iraq from Kuwait was launched in mid-January 1991. By the end of February, Iraq had been forced to withdraw from Kuwait.

Why did the United States decide to go to war in the Persian Gulf? In an attempt to address that question, Steve A. Yetiv (2011) demonstrates how a combination of three different theoretical perspectives is necessary to arrive at a more comprehensive answer: the RAM; the groupthink model; and the cognitive model. This is in line with the eclectic approach recommended by Sil and Katzenstein (2010) where elements of different theories are combined to achieve a fuller explanation. This approach is particularly valuable if the aim of the analysis is to explain a particular outcome, which some scholars term a case-centric approach (Beach and Pedersen 2020). This is the case in Yetiv's study.

The baseline model in Yetiv's analysis is the RAM, which views the United States as a unitary actor driven by its national interests; it also assumes that the decisions made by the US are based on rational choice. The explanation of how and why the United States went to war from a RAM perspective is summarized in Box 9.7.

The *RAM model* highlights the strategic interaction between the US and Iraq and plausibly explains why going to war was ultimately unavoidable. But there are also elements that leave us in the dark, and assumptions that are not questioned. In Yetiv's case, RAM is clearly premised on a realist model of the international system; it is characterized by anarchy and self-help; war is always a possibility. This would appear entirely plausible in the present case; but, as noted in Table 9.1, there are different conceptions of the international system that can lead to different ideas about the systemic pressures on states. RAM can be combined with each of the more general IR theories telling us what goals states cherish (Beach and Pedersen 2020: 101). We cannot fully know whether the decision makers were driven by a realist understanding of

### BOX 9.7 Key Theories: Applying the RAM perspective

The argument is that the United States perceived itself as having vital national interests in the Persian Gulf. In order to protect them, it tried to consider and exhaust diplomatic and economic alternatives to war. It faced an intransigent Iraqi regime, and over time believed that the costs of waiting for sanctions to work increasingly exceeded the benefits. Therefore, taking into consideration Iraq's behaviour in the crisis, and its continuing threat even if it had withdrawn from Kuwait, Washington came to see war as necessary. While Iraq may or may not have reached a similar conclusion, it was also the case that the two sides could not locate or agree upon a negotiated settlement, because their bargaining positions did not overlap very much, if at all. This further inclined the United States towards war. Furthermore, the structural condition of anarchy in international relations enforced this logic. In their strategic interaction, the United States could not trust Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait and not to invade it at a later time, and Iraq could not trust the United States not to attack or harass it, if it agreed to withdraw.

**Quoted from Yetiv (2011: 32–3)**



the international system until we open up the 'black box' and further scrutinize their reflections. Nor can we know whether the process of decision-making was fully rational, as the RAM model assumes. Were all possible alternative options to the war decision carefully identified and meticulously examined before the decision was taken? In order to know about this, other theoretical perspectives that further investigate the process of decision-making are necessary.

The *cognitive model* focuses on the individual key decision maker, in this case President George Herbert Walker Bush. Why did he frequently employ emotional rhetoric against Saddam Hussein? What made him emphatically reject any compromise with Saddam? Why did he tend to prefer the war option ahead of his advisors? Yetiv's application of the cognitive approach focuses on the importance of historical analogies: 'how decision makers create their own images of reality and simplify decision making through the use of analogies' (Yetiv 2011: 99). In the Gulf War case, the most important historical analogy for President Bush was that of Munich, as explained in Box 9.8.

The cognitive model highlights aspects of the US war decision that are not accounted for in the RAM perspective. The notion of historical analogy helps explain why President Bush strongly preferred the war option and rejected compromise with Saddam. Did the strong reliance on historical analogy lead Bush towards acting in a non-rational way? That need not be the case; analogical thinking can help identify the nature of the problem at hand and inform the search for possible courses of action. However, such thinking can also 'undermine rational processes if it introduces significant biases, excludes or restricts the search for novel information, or pushes actors to ignore the facts and options that clash with the message encoded in the analogy' (Yetiv 2011: 61). Did that happen in the Gulf War case? Yetiv's analysis leaves the question open; on the one hand, the analogy supported the efforts of rational thinking; on the other hand, Bush also used the analogy 'to

#### BOX 9.8 Key Theories: Applying the cognitive perspective

For Bush, compromising with Saddam, as many wanted at home and abroad, would have made him a modern-day Neville Chamberlain. As Britain's Prime Minister, Chamberlain yielded to Germany the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia at the 1938 Munich conference, a borderland area of German speakers that Hitler wanted to reintegrate into Germany. Chamberlain, duped by Hitler, believed that his action at Munich, which followed repeated efforts by Britain to appease Nazi Germany, would bring what he called 'peace in our time'. In fact, Hitler proceeded to seize Czechoslovakia and to invade Poland, forcing a change in British policy and creating the Munich analogy, which referred to the failure of appeasement in the face of brutal aggression. Through the Munich lens, Bush tended to see Saddam as a Hitler-like dictator who could not be accommodated or even offered a minor, veiled carrot . . . The analogy made Bush more likely to personalize the conflict with Saddam, to undermine others' efforts at compromise with Saddam, and to prefer war to the continued use of economic sanctions.

**Quoted from Yetiv (2011: 61)**

construct the crisis, so that we could say that the analogy was both heartfelt by a president who experienced World War II and used to advance the war option' (Yetiv 2011: 158).

The *groupthink model* emphasizes critical elements of small-group behaviour that can lead to defective decision-making. Two overlapping groups are of interest in the Gulf War case: an inner group of four that consisted of President George Bush, Vice President Dan Quayle, National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, and Chief-of-Staff John Sununu. An outer group of eight comprised the group of four plus Secretary of State James Baker, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs-of-Staff Colin Powell, and Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates. Yetiv's analysis seeks to demonstrate that the conditions promoting groupthink were present and that they did lead to defective decision-making in the sense that alternative courses to the war option were not given greater consideration. The elements of groupthink in the Gulf War case are set forth in Box 9.9.

This section has briefly demonstrated how different analytical perspectives can be brought together and yield insights into a case-study of why the United States chose to go to war in the Persian Gulf in 1991. The RAM is the most general and comprehensive approach. It takes in the challenges to US national interests raised by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; it posits how the strategic interaction between Iraq and the US inclined the United States towards going to war. Other approaches are less comprehensive; even so, each of them contributes significantly towards understanding why the war option was preferred over other options. Additional perspectives that will yield other insights can be applied; they will generate further information about the case. Scholars will not agree on any 'best combination' of approaches; some will find that the RAM really tells us enough about the case because it examines the challenge to the US presented by Saddam and accounts for why the war option was the response to that challenge. Others might argue that we must appreciate the more specific characteristics of the decision-making process to achieve a full analysis.

#### BOX 9.9 Key Theories: Applying the groupthink approach

The exclusive nature of the group of eight and the rejection of methodical decision-making procedures both contributed to groupthink and made it easier for Bush and Scowcroft to advance the war option without carefully considering the costs and benefits of other alternatives. The group of eight had slowly coalesced, behind its strong and partial group leader, around the notion that economic sanctions would fail . . . Bush insisted on that decision ahead of most of his advisors, and it was adopted without consulting the most senior US generals and admirals, including Powell, who was disturbed by it, and Schwarzkopf, who was furious about it. [Chas W.] Freeman [US ambassador to Saudi Arabia], who played a fundamental role with Schwarzkopf in the field and was in communication with Washington, asserted his view that 'the record will show that a lot of issues were not fully discussed'.

**Quoted from Yetiv (2011: 118)**

By way of conclusion: it may be worth remembering that many foreign policy decisions and actions are taken in circumstances of uncertainty and with imperfect knowledge. Foreign policy is more prone to uncertainty and more exposed to instability and conflict than is domestic policy, which is carried out under the jurisdiction of a sovereign government that possesses the legal authority to preside over domestic society. Not only that: many of the issues and problems that foreign policymakers have to come to grips with are in motion, in flux, and that too will introduce uncertainties and difficulties. Rarely, if ever, can there be ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ foreign policies known to the policymakers at the time. Usually, that knowledge only becomes evident in retrospect. That should perhaps make us sceptical of analytical models that claim to provide definitive accounts of foreign policy decision-making.

## 9.5 A Note on Donald Trump and US Foreign Policy

We have examined foreign policy from different levels of analysis. One aspect that has received increased attention with the Donald Trump presidency concerns the extent to which a powerful, individual decision maker can successfully push forward with his policy ideas given the constraint he faces from a variety of pressures at the systemic level and the level of the nation-state. In other words, there was a stand-off between Trump on the one hand and the system (international and national) on the other hand; who won?

In order to answer that question, we must first interrogate the stand-off: did Trump really want to change US foreign policy in fundamental ways? He was surely different in terms of style and rhetoric. As for style, Trump has been called ‘belligerent, bullying, impatient, irresponsible, intellectually lazy, short-tempered, and self-obsessed’ (Cohen 2019: 138); not a mainstream vocabulary for profiling an American president. In terms of rhetoric, Trump has called US foreign policy before his presidency ‘a complete and total disaster’ in an April 2016 campaign speech (quoted from Heilbrunn 2020). He proposed instead to pursue a policy of ‘America First’ aimed at ‘a future of patriotism, prosperity, and pride’ (speech to UN, September 2018, quoted from Cohen 2019: 143). After his surprise win in the November 2016 elections, there followed a policy of downgrading US engagement in international institutions, renegotiation of trade deals (or threats of trade wars) with China and others, and retreat from intervention and democracy-promotion abroad.

The question is whether these measures—if we lay aside the unorthodox rhetoric with which they were presented—are so different from an earlier tradition of American foreign policy? The strategy of retrenchment dates back to ‘Henry Cabot Lodge, Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Robert Taft’ (Heilbrunn 2020), but Barack Obama could just as well be mentioned. Obama also believed that US interventions abroad had been ‘costly and stupid and that the United States should focus on nation building at home’ (Cohen 2019: 143). Obama’s emphasis on ‘leading from behind’ is one expression of this view.

Both Trump and Obama, then, represent a swing away from the optimistic global democracy-promotion of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, towards a more modest view of US power and an increasing focus on the challenge from China (Walt 2020). This swing might be said to parallel one we saw after the First World War. The interventionist Woodrow Wilson administration had attempted to spread democracy in Latin America, and in 1917 Wilson went to war against Germany to make the world ‘safe for

democracy'. These ambitions were gradually dismantled by the Republican administrations headed by Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover in the 1920s, and then definitively abandoned by Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who famously captured the volte-face with his declaration in 1936 that the Nicaraguan dictator 'Somoza may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch' (Cornell et al. 2020: 25–7; Drake 2009: 3–13). Eliot Cohen argues that, instead of:

the mistake of a foreign policy rookie, the notion of 'America first' is 'an expression of something deeper and more consequential: a permanent shift, among American leaders, away from the dominant postwar conception of US foreign policy. In other hands, and with a more intelligent articulation, Trump's foreign policy vision would amount to a doctrine—one in which the United States is merely one great power among others. In this view Washington should pursue its own interests, stand for freedom chiefly at home and only intermittently abroad, and reject as a matter of principle the international organizations that previous generations of US leaders so carefully built.

**(Cohen 2019: 143–4)**

A more cynical interpretation, which amounts to much the same view, is that Trump's foreign policy is the natural reaction of a declining hegemonic power no longer willing to invest in common purposes of the international society.

There is a more general point to make here. However maverick he seemed, Donald Trump, like every other individual decision maker, was constrained by both domestic-level factors and by the international system. At home, he regularly lashed out against courts and the 'deep state' but his most blatant attack on democracy, his prolonged campaign against the result of the November 2020 election, ultimately failed; though not before it had culminated in shocking scenes as his supporters stormed the Capitol in January 2021. Similarly, while he often pretended that normal rules of foreign engagement did not apply to him, and that he would be able to close great 'deals' beyond the reach of other American decision makers, he still faced the same international constraints as his predecessors. In a situation where American power seems to be waning, this spells ill for global American initiative and leadership. If this is true, the United States will fail to lead, also after the Trump presidency. Many observers, both liberal and realist, consider this bad news in terms of prospects for an effective and legitimate order (Wright 2020; see also Chapter 12).

## 9.6 Integrating International and Domestic Factors

The study of foreign policy almost by definition attempts to combine domestic and international explanatory factors. This chapter has thus been structured around a level-of-analysis approach that addresses the international system level, the nation-state level, and the level of the individual decision maker. Compared with previous theories and approaches, the biggest difference is probably that FPA also takes Waltz's first level-of-analysis, in the form of individual decision makers, seriously. This was the level emphasized by traditional studies of foreign policy, and while these studies have been heavily criticized, individual decision makers have recently made a comeback, riding on the tailcoats of new insights imported from behavioural psychology.

FPA thus emphasizes the way human agents and structures interact (Hudson and Day 2020: 1–28). However, different theories focus on different aspects of these interactions. The study of foreign policy is starkly eclectic in that it draws in other IR theories, as well as more specific FPA theories. Even systemic IR theories such as offensive and defensive realism provide predictions and policy advice about foreign policy; for instance, to guide American decision makers confronting the increased economic and military might of China. These neo-realist theories are state-centred, and they pay little attention to domestic factors. But other IR theories take a very different view of foreign policy. Liberal theories generally argue that domestic politics influences foreign policies. For example, recent decades have seen an accumulation of research on how the different political constraints faced in democracies and autocracies affect foreign policy (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2012). Finally, the more specific FPA theories that we have reviewed in this chapter emphasize different aspects of Waltz's three levels-of-analysis. Some theories focus on national-level bureaucratic structures and processes; others on individual-level or group-level cognitive processes and psychology; and yet others attempt to bring individuals, political, or bureaucratic structures and international constraints together in one unified framework.

Our view is that FPA needs to combine explanatory levels to fully realize its potential. In the case illustration, based on the study of the Iraq war by Yetiv (2011), we have demonstrated how this can be done, and some of the insights that it provides. Similarly, when discussing the imprint of Donald Trump on American foreign policy, we have emphasized erratic aspects of his personality and policies but also shown how other aspects of his 'America First'-policy have deep domestic roots. We claimed that Trump faced much the same international constraints as any other president in the period 2017–21 would have.

When studying foreign policy, scholars should thus not fear being eclectic. We see Horowitz et al.'s (2015) new study, reviewed in this chapter, as a good example of this. While it appreciates the importance of leader attributes, it nests predictions based on these individual-level characteristics in existing theoretical and empirical insights about the way international structure and domestic politics constrain foreign policy choices. That provides room for both actors and structures in FPA. One of the most talented practitioners of foreign policy in history, German prime minister Otto von Bismarck, once captured this with a one-liner: 'Man cannot create and control the current of events. He can only float with it and steer' (Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung; author's own translation).

### \* Key points

- Foreign policy analysis is the study of the management of external relations and activities of nation-states, as distinguished from their domestic policies. Foreign policy involves goals, strategies, measures, methods, guidelines, directives, understandings, agreements, and so on, by which national governments conduct international relations with each other and with international organizations and non-governmental actors.

- There is a debate about whether or not general IR theories are helpful for analysing foreign policy. Most scholars argue that general IR theories have a number of interesting things to say about the constraints states face in foreign politics and the way the aims of states are formulated. Seen from this vantage point, there is a large toolbox available for foreign policy analysis. Many scholars therefore use the various major theories presented in Part 2 of this book as approaches to study particular aspects of foreign policymaking.
- **‘Multilevel, multidimensional’.** Over the last two or three decades, it has become increasingly clear that there will never be one all-encompassing theory of foreign policy, just as there will never be one exclusive theory of IR. For this reason, it has become popular to combine different theories to analyse how particular foreign policies were formulated.
- **Bureaucratic structures and processes.** This approach focuses on the organizational context of decision-making, which is seen to be conditioned by the dictates and demands of the bureaucratic settings in which decisions are made. Analysing processes and channels whereby organizations arrive at their policies is seen to be a superior way to acquire empirical knowledge of foreign policy.
- **Cognitive processes and psychology.** This approach focuses on the individual decision maker, paying particular attention to the psychological aspects of decision making. It has recently received a new boost due to insights imported from behavioural psychology and behavioural economics.
- Social constructivists focus on the role of ideas and discourse, as recorded in Chapter 7. For constructivists, foreign policymaking is an intersubjective world, whose ideas and discourse can be scrutinized in order to arrive at a better theoretical understanding of the process.
- The usual situation facing foreign policymakers is one of having to choose between different possible courses of action. That raises two fundamental questions: what policy choices, if any, are available? Of those, which is the best course to follow? Responding to such questions takes us to the heart of foreign policymaking.
- The RAM approach indicates the challenges to US national interest raised by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; it posits how strategic interaction between Iraq and the US inclined the United States towards going to war against Iraq as leader of a military coalition.
- Despite the many approaches to foreign policy and levels of analysis outlined in this chapter, it remains an imperfect and controversial body of knowledge, where even the most knowledgeable experts are likely to disagree on vital issues. Recently there has been renewed attention to the role of individual decision makers in the context of the Trump presidency. The crucial question is whether Trump is pursuing an external policy that is radically different from what another president would have done; we have presented arguments for and against this view.

## ? Questions

- What is foreign policy analysis fundamentally concerned with?
- Which is the best approach to foreign policy analysis, and why?

- Are system-level IR theories such as neoliberalism and interdependence liberalism relevant for analysing foreign policy? If so, what do they shed light on?
- Which level of foreign policy analysis makes most sense, and why?
- Should foreign policy be confined to foreign ministries or state departments (as realists and International Society scholars argue), or should it extend also to groups in society (as liberals argue)?
- How useful is the RAM approach for explaining why the United States chose to go to war in the Persian Gulf in 1991?
- Can theories or models of foreign policymaking be applied in making foreign policy decisions or can they only be used to explain those decisions after they have been made?
- Do the pressures and uncertainties of making foreign policy in reality and on the go require experienced policymakers, if they are to be successful?
- What are the characteristics of 'groupthink' in foreign policy formulation and what are its consequences?
- Was Donald Trump 'one of a kind' or does he represent a new, general tendency for the principles of US foreign policy?
- Which early life experiences of individual leaders seem to matter most for the foreign policies they pursue, according to recent scholarship?

### Guide to further reading

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Access the online resources to take your learning and understanding further, including review questions, case studies, web links, flashcards, and a database of videos.



[www.oup.com/he/sorensen-moller8e](http://www.oup.com/he/sorensen-moller8e)



## CHAPTER 10

# Major Issues in IPE: Economic versus Political Power, Development, Globalization, How to Study the Real World

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### Summary

This chapter presents four of the most important issues in IPE. The first issue concerns power and the relationship between politics and economics. Is politics in charge of economics or is it the other way around? This debate focuses on the way the rules of the game are formulated and maintained in international affairs. It was sparked by the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system in the early 1970s but it is not only of historical interest; it is crucial for our understanding of who has power in the world today. The second issue concerns development and underdevelopment in the developing world. A number of developing countries are today successful modernizers, including China, India, and Brazil, but that does not mean we can expect modernization to succeed everywhere. The third issue is about the nature and extent of economic globalization. How extensive is economic globalization, who drives the process, and who benefits from it? Is globalization fundamentally changing our world, or is it simply intensifying the internationalization of economic relations that began long ago? The fourth issue concerns how to study the real world as IPE scholars. It pits the hard science American School of IPE against the more qualitative and normative British School of IPE.

## 10.1 Four Major Issues in IPE

Chapter 6 presented three general theories of or approaches to IPE. They have deep historical roots, but the current versions of them were developed in the 1970s and 1980s. They continue to be under construction, of course, and to develop in many new directions. At the same time, many of the theoretical disputes we have introduced in other chapters are also on the table among IPE scholars (Cohen 2008; 2019). Different theories, inspired by social constructivism (see Chapter 7) or post-positivism (see Chapter 8) have entered the field of IPE; a recent analysis identified no less than 19 different ‘traditions of thought’ in IPE (Watson 2020; see also Seabrooke and Young 2017). All these theories attempt to tackle a large number of different subjects, including trade, production, finance, corporations, institutions, varieties of capitalism, and a host of other issues.

This illustrates an important point: IPE is not a coherent theory but more of a ‘set of approaches’ or even just a ‘field of inquiry’ (Ravenhill 2020: 20). We have devoted this chapter to understanding what real-world issues IPE scholars are most interested in, and how they study these issues or problems. We concentrate on four issues that are especially prominent in IPE: the relationship between politics and economics, development and underdevelopment, economic globalization, and how to empirically investigate problems of international political economy.

The first issue concerns power and the relationship between politics and economics. Is politics in charge of economics or is it the other way around? For realist–mercantilists, states control markets; politics is in charge of economics. Liberals recognize the influence of politics, but they consider the market an autonomous sphere of society, which has a dynamic of its own. For Marxists, the class forces emerging from the capitalist

economy are the basic drivers of both economic and political development. In IPE, these issues formed the backdrop of a large-scale debate about systemic transformation and system governance that began in the 1970s. It was triggered by the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system in the early 1970s and concerned what was to replace it. Realists such as Robert Gilpin were sceptical that common rules of economic intercourse could be designed in the absence of a liberal hegemon such as the US. Liberals such as Robert Keohane were more hopeful and placed their trust in international rules and institutions governing global relations, including economic relations. Why is this debate important? Because it fundamentally affects our understanding of who has power in the world today and thus drives the major changes in the global economy. It is crucial for understanding how ongoing changes in the international power structure, including the 'rise of China', are likely to affect the global economic order.

The second issue concerns development and underdevelopment in the developing world. Liberals emphasize the constructive role of market forces for economic development; realist-mercantilists point to the leading role of the state in the process. Marxists stress the ties of dependency and exploitation that hamper development in the Global South (the term used by many Marxists for the 'developing world'). Today, this discussion takes place in a new context; a number of developing countries, including China, India, Brazil, and several others have had high rates of economic growth for a long period and appear to be successful modernizers. They throw a new light on the debate about the conditions that promote or impede a process of development.

The third issue is about the nature and extent of economic globalization. How extensive is economic globalization, who drives the process, and who benefits from it? For liberals, it is a market-driven process with great potential to bring benefits to all. For realists, states are basically in charge of globalization and heavily influence who gets what from the process. Marxists see globalization as an uneven, hierarchical process where the advanced industrialized countries benefit the most. Moreover, some see globalization as old wine on new bottles, an intensification of Keohane and Nye's (1977) 'complex interdependence' rather than something new and qualitatively different; others argue that it marks a genuine historical transformation. This debate presently takes place in a context of increasing inequality, particularly inside countries; it is also informed by the serious financial crisis which broke out in 2008 and has led to a discussion about the viability of the current model of capitalism in the United States and Western Europe.

The fourth issue differs in that it does not address a substantial subject of international economic relations; rather, it concerns the kind of evidence that can be used in IPE, or how to study the real world as IPE scholars. Many IPE scholars support the enterprise of 'hard science', of explaining on the basis of quantitative data collection and rigorous empirical testing. Others prefer a qualitative historical approach where the theorist puts herself inside the subject in an attempt to understand the moral dilemmas and the values that drive actors to move in certain directions (see Chapter 2). Several other scholars maintain that these positions can be combined and that a constructive 'middle ground' can be found (Ravenhill 2020). To capture this debate, we contrast the hard science model of American IPE and the British School of IPE, which instead emphasizes qualitative and critical perspectives (Cohen 2019).

## 10.2 Power and the Relationship between Politics and Economics

A world characterized by capitalism and economic globalization must rest on a stable framework of liberal rules and regulations. Realists argue that such a framework can only be provided by a hegemon; that is, a dominant military and economic power (Mearsheimer 2018). In the absence of such a power, liberal rules cannot be created and enforced around the world. That is the theory of hegemonic stability which is indebted to mercantilist thinking about politics being in charge of economics. But **hegemonic stability theory** (HST) is not exclusively realist. There is also a liberal element: the dominant power does not merely manipulate international economic relations for its own sake; it creates an open world economy based on free trade which is to the benefit of all participating states and not only the hegemon. The version of the theory we present here was first set forth by Charles Kindleberger (1973), it was further developed by Robert Gilpin (1975; 1987) and informed by several recent debates (Schmidt 2018; Gavris 2019).

Why is the theory of hegemonic stability important? Because, if it is true, we must expect international markets to depend on the existence of a liberal dominant power. In the absence of such a hegemon, an open world economy will be much more difficult to sustain. There is a risk that economic relations will deteriorate into nationalistic, self-interested, protectionist competition, as they did during the world economic crisis of the 1930s, when countries pursued 'beggar-thy-neighbour' national policies (Kindleberger 1973). The United States was already the largest economic power at the time, but it was not willing to shoulder the responsibility of creating and maintaining a liberal economic world order. That willingness emerged only after the Second World War, which put an end to American isolationism. In short, for a liberal economic world order to come into being, the mere capability of a dominant power is not enough; it must also have a willingness to take on the task. Finally, there must be a commitment to sustain a liberal order once it has been created: to support it not only in good times when the world economy is expanding but also in bad times when it is in recession and states may be tempted to beggar their neighbours.

What kinds of power resources are necessary for a hegemon to perform its role? This question is not easy to answer, because it involves the complex issue of the fungibility of power. A power resource is fungible if it can be used across several areas. For example, military force is not only useful on the battlefield; it can also be used as a lever in other areas of foreign policy, such as trade policies. In the IR debate about these issues, the claim is that the fungibility of military power is decreasing (Nye 1990; 2011). We will return to the issue later in this section. Here, it suffices to say that a dominant state needs a number of different power resources to perform the role of hegemon. In addition to military power, according to Keohane (1984: 32), it requires control over four sets of world economic resources: raw materials, capital, markets, and the hegemon's competitive advantage in the production of goods that can command a very high value.

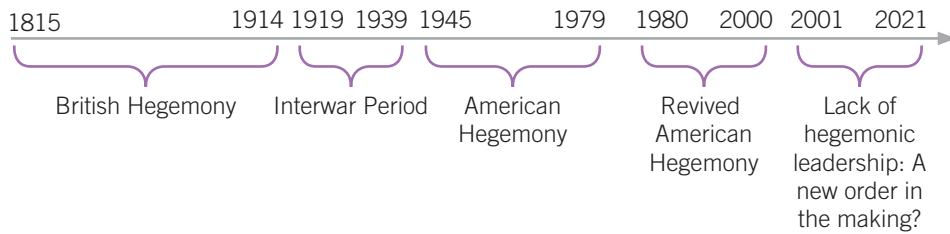
Why is a hegemon required in order to create and maintain a liberal world economy? Might we not expect that smaller, less powerful states will be interested in a liberal

world economy because that is to the benefit of all? Why would they not cooperate to sustain such an economy? According to the theory of hegemonic stability, the need for a hegemon has to do with the nature of the goods that it provides. Kindleberger (1973) based HST on Nobel laureate Mancur Olson's logic of collective action. A liberal world economy is a so-called public or collective good; that is, a good or a service which, once supplied, creates benefits for everybody. **Public goods** are characterized by non-excludability; i.e., others cannot be denied access to them. The air we breathe is an example of such a public good. A lighthouse is another example; so is a road or a pavement. The elements of a liberal world economy, such as a currency system for international payments, or the possibility to trade in a free market, are public goods. Once created, they are there for the benefit of all.

The problem with public goods is underprovision and what the economists call 'free riding'; i.e., making use of the goods without paying for them. Why should anyone sustain the cost to provide such a good in the first place if it is there to be used at no cost, once it is supplied? Public goods invite free riding. That is where the hegemon comes in: such a dominant power is needed to provide those goods and to deal with problems created by free riders, for example, by penalizing them. Why would the hegemon do that? Because it has a huge stake in the system.

Kindleberger (1973) used a study of the interwar Great Depression to formulate HST. Surveying two centuries, he identified a striking overlap between liberal hegemony in international affairs and economic stability. There are two major historical examples of liberal hegemons: Great Britain in the period from the end of the Napoleonic Wars to the First World War (1815–1914); and the United States after the Second World War (1945–) (Gilpin 1987: 73) (see Figure 10.1). Britain was a global trading power and imperial power and, as such, had a profound interest in maintaining an open world economy based on free trade. For instance, from 1821 to 1914, it upheld the so-called 'Gold Standard', which fixed the price of the British Pound Sterling to gold to the advantage of trade. Britain lost its position of hegemony in the early twentieth century when other powers began to rival and surpass it, particularly Germany and the United States. After the Second World War, the United States took the lead in setting up new institutions of a reformed liberal world economy: the IMF, the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, now replaced by the WTO), and the OECD. This set of institutions and the agreements on financial stability was called the Bretton Woods system, named after the small town in the US where the agreement was made in 1944.

By the 1970s, the US started running trade deficits for the first time in the post-war era. US policies became more oriented towards national interests. Instead of sustaining the post-1945 liberal world economy, the US adopted protectionist measures to support its own economy. America began to act as a 'predatory hegemon' (John Conybeare, quoted from Gilpin 1987). In other words, the US became more concerned about its own national interests, began to lose sight of its role as the defender of an open world economy, and perhaps even started to exploit its power position. It was a new era characterized by 'increasing protectionism, monetary instability, and economic crisis' (Gilpin 1987: 351).

**FIGURE 10.1** Liberal hegemony, 1800–2021

These developments raised the question whether governance can work if the dominant state does not fulfil its role as hegemonic leader or, even more so, if there is no state capable of picking up the mantle as hegemon. This question pitted realists such as Gilpin against liberals such as Keohane in the IPE debates of the 1970s and 1980s. As described, HST was based on Mancur Olson's logic of collective action. However, as Keohane (1984) pointed out in *After Hegemony*, the logic of collective action can be overcome in other ways than by a hegemon; a group of states can equally well provide a public good 'when common interests exist' (1984: 6). Keohane concludes that cooperation in the form of international regimes can be created even in the absence of a hegemonic power. Once the necessary international institutions are set up, they have a staying power of their own, they operate independently of the states that created them, and they are able to promote further cooperation even in the circumstances of hegemonic decline: 'Regimes may be maintained, and may continue to foster cooperation, even under conditions that would not be sufficiently benign to bring about their creation' (Keohane 1984: 216).

The regime debate was at the centre of IPE in the 1980s. This work was a response to the 'control gap' created by the increased interdependence and the weakening of US power, which had been identified by Keohane and Nye, and Gilpin, respectively (Cohen 2008: 95). The main insight was that the widening 'control gap' could be filled by the creation and maintenance of regimes, that is 'implicit or explicit understandings about the rules of the game that help to sustain mutually beneficial patterns of cooperation' (Cohen 2008: 100). Regimes help solve the problem that cooperation often fails even if it is in the interest of most states (Keohane 1984: 6). Krasner's (1983) work was especially important here, and it generally corroborated Keohane and Nye's (1977) insight that the fact that international relations are anarchic does not necessarily mean that these relations are chaotic (Cohen 2008: 96).

Both realists and liberals within IPE saw increased international cooperation as natural in the period 1945–70: realists such as Gilpin because of American hegemony, liberals such as Keohane because of increased interdependence (Keohane 1984: 9). Regimes provided the 'intervening variable' that explained why cooperation continued in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, Krasner's work on regimes can be seen as a way of addressing the surprising (based on his realist vantage point) fact that the decline of American power had not weakened international cooperation (Cohen 2008: 99–100).

However, the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s never went very deep and did not threaten the viability of the Western economic order. The end of the Cold War meant

a new, tremendous boost, for that order. The Soviet Union folded, and so did the Eastern system of planned economies. By the 1990s, it was no longer clear that American hegemony was waning; rather, it seemed to be on the ascendancy again (Cohen 2008: 76–7). This made the system transformation debate less prominent, especially in American IPE. Both the realist HST theory and the liberal counterarguments had been based on an exaggerated view of American decline. That much was clear on the eve of the twentieth century.

Almost all countries were now eager to join the Western system of capitalism and economic globalization. Many did so with great success, and in recent years China and other states have been catching up economically. Thirty years ago, China accounted for 3.8 per cent of the global GDP and the United States stood for 25 per cent. Today, the Chinese share is 19 per cent and the US share is 15 per cent (Quandl 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to further boost the Chinese share at the expense of the American, at least in the short to medium term (Stasavage 2020). It is thus clear that China and other modernizing states are in a process of catching up economically. To what extent will this threaten US hegemony, and will it mean a crisis for the global capitalist order as predicted by some observers? (See Figure 10.2.)

Let us look at the issue of US power first. The United States remains very strong in traditional power resources (military, economy, technology, territory). There has been a relative decline in the overall economic terms but that was probably inevitable given the great disparities of earlier days. The US continues to lead the world in areas of high-technology innovation and competition (see Table 10.1). Furthermore, as indicated, the US is especially strong in the most advanced, information-rich industries, which now count more in terms of economic power than industrial capacity. Finally, the US also remains strong in non-material power resources, such as ‘popular culture’ with universal appeal; e.g., films, television, Internet, and so on. Liberal values in line with American ideology also permeate international institutions such as the IMF and the WTO. That gives the United States a substantial amount of **soft power** (see Box 10.1).

If we accept these arguments, we are led to the conclusion that US hegemony is still very much in place. This is confirmed in a recent analysis which argues that the wide range of US power resources gives the United States the position of ‘history’s most

**FIGURE 10.2** US hegemony and global capitalist order

**1990:** The end of the Cold War. US hegemony reconfirmed.

**2000s:** Rise of modernizing states: US hegemony threatened.

**2010s:** US hegemony in the world economy in decline?

**Today:** A global capitalist order in crisis?

**TABLE 10.1** Power resources of major countries/regions

SOURCE OF POWER	US	RUSSIA	EUROPE	JAPAN	CHINA
<i>Tangible:</i>					
Basic resources	strong	strong	strong	medium	strong
Military	strong	medium	medium	weak	strong
Economic	strong	medium	strong	medium	strong
Science/technology	strong	weak	strong	strong	medium
<i>Intangible:</i>					
National cohesion	strong	medium	weak	strong	strong
Universalistic culture	strong	weak	strong	medium	weak
International institutions	strong	medium	strong	medium	medium

Note: Modified from Nye (2002: 35–40; see also Brown 2013)

**BOX 10.1** Key Concepts: Soft power

A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness. In this sense, it is just as important to set the agenda in world politics and attract others as it is to force them to change through the threat or use of military or economic weapons. This aspect of power—getting others to want what you want—I call soft power.

**Nye (2002: 9)**

complete global hegemon’ (Brown 2013: 24). The problem with this view is that it focuses only on the power resources a country has in different areas so that the leading power is the one with the greatest power portfolio. But a successful liberal hegemon does not merely possess great power in terms of resources; it is also able and willing to put these resources to use in the creation of an effective and stable world economy. Here, the US track record is less spectacular, both before and after the end of the Cold War.

So power resources are not the problem. The problem is about the United States rising to the task of assuming responsibility for the liberal world economy (for a similar line of reasoning, see Nye 2011). This criticism has been voiced against the Republican administration of George W. Bush, the Democratic administration of Barack Obama and, particularly, the Republican administration of Donald Trump (Daalder and Lindsay 2018); the US remains the world’s supreme power but does not fill the role of enlightened leadership. Instead, US policy is more narrowly focused on satisfying domestic interest groups. Donald Trump was explicitly concerned with putting ‘America First’, but several



commentators argue that domestic concerns have been high on the American agenda for quite some time (Wade 2008). Already in 2004, Ian Campbell complained about the lack of US global leadership (see Box 10.2). This is a threat against American soft power, but the pursuit of trade disputes or even trade wars is also a threat against the economic strength of the US, because the country does not stand to gain from such confrontations (Bouët and Laborde 2018; Chong and Li 2019; Sheng, Zhao, and Zhao 2019).

The neo-Marxist position as set forth by Robert Cox agrees that the relative economic decline of the US presents problems for a stable economic order. But Cox follows the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci by emphasizing the ideological dimension of hegemony. A stable hegemonic order is based on a shared set of values and understandings derived ‘from the ways of doing and thinking of the dominant social strata of the dominant state’ (Cox 1996: 517). In other words, US hegemony was based not only on material power but also on consent; i.e., a model of society that other countries found attractive and wanted to emulate. A good example is the American ability to persuade developing countries that free trade benefits everyone, when in fact, seen from Cox’s neo-Marxist perspective, it institutionalizes uneven exchange (see Chapter 6).

This line of thought is close to the liberal idea about soft power (see Box 10.1), but it also underlines a notion of power as resources combined with the ability and willingness to employ these resources in the construction of a stable world economy. Furthermore, many Marxists see US hegemony as a vehicle for control over weaker states by the bourgeoisies of the US and other leading Western countries in ways that were to the economic and political benefit of the West. From this perspective, the liberal world economy is a misnomer for economic and political control of the world by a Western capitalist elite for its own benefit.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, some scholars argued that we were living in an age of US empire (Hardt and Negri 2000; Mann 2003; Münckler 2005). Today, others

### BOX 10.2 Key Arguments: No leadership in the world economy

The world no longer has a leader in economic policymaking. Nowhere is that lack of leadership more evident than in trade. The failure of the ministerial summit meeting of the WTO in Cancun, Mexico in September was prepared by the prior positions adopted by the main players: the United States, the European Union and developing countries. The positions of all were characterized by hypocrisy. Perhaps the greatest hypocrisy, however, was that of the United States, which preaches the merits of free trade more strongly than almost any other country and yet spends tens of billions of dollars to prevent its own markets from being free and has taken fresh measures in recent years to discriminate against other countries’ producers . . . Developing countries that depend utterly on agriculture are forced to compete with a US agricultural sector that is hugely subsidized. Yet the United States constantly urges countries to open their own markets and allow freer access to US goods and services.

**Campbell (2004: 111)**



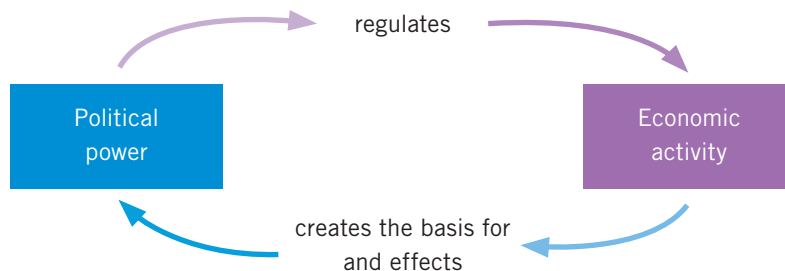
believe that American power is fragile and unstable (Acharya 2014; Buzan 2011). On the basis of the above reflections we can try to settle this dispute. On the one hand, the United States remains number one in terms of power resources; that is the basis for US strength. It should be added that many emphasize military power as the area with most pronounced US dominance. But coercion is a less useful instrument after the end of the Cold War because the common enemy has gone and there is no pressing threat to interstate peace. On the other hand, the United States has not recently been consistently able and willing to put these resources to good use and for that reason several observers find that there is a crisis in the world economy rather than a stable hegemonic order; that is the basis for US weakness.

In this situation, is the global capitalist order then in crisis as indicated in Figure 10.2? The optimistic view is that the system of governance has actually worked pretty well, even in the face of financial crisis and the ensuing 'Great Recession': 'The evidence suggests that global governance structures adapted and responded to the 2008 financial crisis in a robust fashion. They passed the stress test' (Drezner 2012: 18). As Ravenhill (2017: 5–7) observes, though the downturn was in some dimensions 'sharper than that of the 1930s', the interwar beggar-thy-neighbour policies were largely avoided. This supports the notion that international regimes are strong today. A good illustration is the difference between the loose nature of international cooperation during Pax Britannica (such as the aforementioned Gold Standard) and the much more institutionalized nature of international cooperation that was created after the Second World War (Ravenhill 2017: 11–12).

Others argue that the prospects for global order have deteriorated with the Trump presidency. Trade wars, disputes with allies, and international institutions moving towards gridlock do not allow for high hopes of an effective and well-functioning order. We shall return to this debate in Chapter 12.

What can we learn from these discussions about the larger debate concerning the relationship between politics and economics? First, while realism is correct in pointing to the need for a political framework as a foundation for economic activity, it does not mean that there is a one-way relationship in which politics is in control of economics. The economic sphere has a dynamic of its own and unequal economic development between states reshuffles the basis for political power. There is a logic of politics and a logic of economics which influence each other, but economics is not entirely controlled by politics and vice versa. This relationship is summarized in Figure 10.3.

**FIGURE 10.3** Politics and economics



**TABLE 10.2** Politics and economics in theories of IPE

	<b>TRUE CLAIM</b>	<b>FALSE CLAIM</b>
Realism-mercantilism	Political actors create a framework for economic activity	Politics is in full control of economics
Marxism	Economics affects and influences politics	Economics determines politics
Liberalism	The market has an economic dynamic of its own	The market is an autonomous sphere of society

Second, the relative decline of the US has not meant a total breakdown of the liberal world economy, but it is also clear that the current neoliberal regime of regulation needs to be modified in order to create more economic stability. This raises the question about how much leadership and political management is necessary in order to secure a well-functioning global economic order. The debate comes at a time when the once very popular theory of hegemonic stability (HST) is under increasing attack (Gavris 2019).

In conclusion, one cannot say that politics is in full control of economics, as realists would have us believe; but it is true that political regulation creates the framework for economic activity. Nor can it be said that economics determines politics, as many Marxists claim; but it is true that economic dynamics affect and influence political power. The liberal claim that the market economy is an autonomous sphere of society is misleading; but it is true that once political regulation has created a market economy, that economy has a dynamic of its own. There is a complex relationship between politics and economics, as shown in Table 10.2.

Liberalism, Marxism, and realism-mercantilism have each revealed an important aspect of the political–economic relationship. They also disclose distinct shortcomings: they cannot stand alone. We need elements of each theory in order to investigate the complex relationship between politics and economics.

### 10.3 Development and Underdevelopment in the Developing World

Questions about problems in the developing or postcolonial world (in Asia, Africa, and Latin America) were hardly ever asked before the 1950s. However, decolonization, beginning in the 1950s, marked the introduction of development research on a larger, international scale. It was economic liberals who spearheaded development research in the West. Their various contributions were given the label ‘**modernization theory**’. The basic idea was that developing countries should be expected to follow the

same developmental path taken earlier by the developed countries in the West: a progressive journey from a traditional, pre-industrial, agrarian society towards a modern, industrial, mass-consumption society. Development meant overcoming barriers of pre-industrial production, backward institutions, and parochial value systems which impeded the process of growth and modernization. Many economic liberals take note of a dualism in developing countries; i.e., a traditional sector still rooted in the countryside and an emerging modern sector concentrated in the cities. The two sectors exist in relative isolation from each other. The only significant linkage is that the traditional sector functions as a reservoir of labour for the modern sector. This spread of development dynamics from the modern sector to the traditional sector is a core problem in getting economic development underway (Lewis 1970; Boianovsky 2018). Economic liberals, or modernization theorists as they are often called in the development debate, endeavour to identify the full range of impediments to modernization as well as all factors that promote modernization. Their core idea is that the modern sector will crowd out the traditional sector if economic activity is allowed to go on unfettered (Gilpin 1987: 67). Economic liberals thus underscore the need for an open economy, free of political interference, to help generate the large amounts of investment that are required to foster sustained economic growth and development (Lal 1983). A famous modernization theory by W. W. Rostow (1960; 1978) specifically stressed that the ‘take-off’, the crucial push in moving from traditional towards modern, is characterized by a marked increase in modern-sector investment, to a minimum of 10 per cent of the gross national product. Another critical element concerns the relationship of developing countries with the world market. Close market relations with the developed countries are seen to have a positive effect on developing world economies. Foreign trade is viewed as a road to market expansion and further growth of the modern sector. Foreign direct investment in the developing world by transnational corporations (TNCs) brings in much-needed modern technology and production skills. The economic liberal theory can be summarized as shown in Figure 10.4.

The liberal understanding of development was subjected to increasing criticism during the 1960s and 1970s (Gilman 2018). That was partly in reaction to the lack of progress in many developing countries at that time. While growth rates in the developed world reached unprecedented highs in the post-war decades, many developing countries had difficulties in getting economic development underway. Their economies refused to ‘take off’. That naturally led to increasing dissatisfaction with modernization theory.

**FIGURE 10.4** The liberal economic development theory



Essential modernization factors:

- a market economy, free of political interference
- a growing rate of economic investment
- foreign direct investment

The most radical critique of economic liberals came from neo-Marxist underdevelopment theory, which is also known as **dependency theory**. It draws on classical Marxist analysis. But it is different from classical Marxism in a basic respect. Unlike Marx, dependency theorists do not expect capitalist development to take root and unfold in the developing world in the same way that capitalism first took place in Western Europe and North America. Unlike Soviet Marxism, dependency theorists do not support a Soviet model with its centralized and highly authoritarian system. Instead, they argue in favour of a socialist model that is more decentralized and democratic. Their main aim, however, is to critique the dependency form that capitalist development is seen to take in the developing world (for general overviews, see Kay 1989; Hettne 1995). In short, dependency theory is an attack on late capitalism. It is an attempt to provide the theoretical tools by which developing countries can defend themselves against globalizing capitalism.

We saw earlier that for economic liberals ‘traditional society’ was the place where all countries started their process of development and modernization. Dependency theory rejects that view. The starting point for dependency theory is not tradition; it is underdevelopment. Earlier forms of society in the developing world may have been undeveloped; but underdevelopment begins only with the arrival of global capitalism. It is a process within the framework of the global capitalist system to which developing countries have been subjected: they have been underdeveloped as an intentional by-product of the development of the West, via exploitation. Underdevelopment is the process by which capitalist forces expand to subdue and impoverish the developing world. That is, global capitalism in one single process generates development and wealth (in the industrialized world) and underdevelopment and poverty (in the developing world).

Under such adverse global conditions, how can development be brought to the developing world? Radical dependency theorists, such as Andre Gunder Frank (1969; 1977) and Samir Amin (1976; 1990), do not hesitate to argue that developing countries have to cut off, or at least severely limit, their ties to the capitalist world market. Through reliance on their own strength, as well as mutual cooperation, real economic development becomes possible, outside the reach of capitalist world market exploitation. Moderate dependency theorists, such as Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Cardoso and Faletto 1979), are less severe in their critique of the capitalist world market. They argue that some progress in the developing world is possible even given the ties of external dependence on the capitalist West. We can summarize the radical dependency view as shown in Box 10.3 (see also Ghosh 2019; for an updated analysis of the consequences of imperialism, see Kohli 2020).

Radical dependency theory came under fire during the 1970s and went into decline. A number of countries in South East Asia, most notably the ‘Four Tigers’ (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong), experienced rapid economic growth combined with world market integration. That was a blow to dependency theory’s prediction of stagnation and misery and seemed to support liberal modernization theory. Furthermore, dependency theorists had downplayed domestic factors in their analyses, such as the role of the state and social forces. To some extent, the world systems analysis by Wallerstein set forth in Chapter 6 has an answer to such critiques. Wallerstein builds

**BOX 10.3** Key Theories: Dependency theory of underdevelopment

1. Underdevelopment is caused by factors external to the poor countries. Developing countries are dominated by foreign interests originating in the developed West.
2. Underdevelopment is not a phase of 'traditional society' experienced by all countries. Both development and underdevelopment are results of a single process of global capitalist development.
3. Underdevelopment is due to external, primarily economic, forces; these forces result in crippled and distorted societal structures inside developing countries.
4. To overcome underdevelopment, a delinking from external dominance is required.

on ideas from dependency theory about unequal exchange and underdevelopment in the periphery. But in his view, some countries, such as the 'Four Tigers', may well move ahead; other countries will simply move in the opposite direction and, overall, hierarchy and unequal exchange continues to characterize the capitalist world economy. Even scholars who defend the international capitalist system concede that patterns of global inequality are very stable. As Iversen and Soskice (2019) point out, for more than a century, only Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Israel, Ireland, and Hong Kong have moved into the group of 'advanced capitalist economies'. The main reason that global inequality has fallen a little in recent decades is that two very populous countries, China and India, have moved into the lower set of middle-income countries (Iversen and Soskice 2019: 26), or what Wallerstein would label the semi-periphery. Furthermore, Wallerstein would protest against labelling his analysis as economic; economics and politics affect each other in a dialectical interaction (see also Coccia 2019; Babones 2017).

Whereas economic liberals argue in favour of world market integration in order to promote development, and dependency theorists argue for delinking, mercantilists suggest a middle road. Raul Prebisch (1950) and Gunnar Myrdal (1957) had already argued in the 1950s against free trade based on comparative advantage. The economic benefits which liberals said would accrue to the South according to the theory of comparative advantage were not forthcoming. That was owing to a long-term decline in the terms of trade for the South's traditional exports.<sup>1</sup> In other words, those export commodities lost much of their previous value on world markets, whereas industrial and increasingly high-technology imports still cost the same or even more. Therefore, it was necessary to actively promote industrialization in the South, even if such industry may be comparatively high-cost in the initial phase. If liberal comparative advantage can be criticized, so can dependency ideas about delinking. Modern mercantilists thus suggest a compromise between the extremes of economic autonomy and full integration into the global capitalist economy.

<sup>1</sup> 'Terms of trade' is the ratio of export and import prices. When developing countries receive less for their raw material exports and have to pay more for import of industrialized goods, their terms of trade deteriorate.

**TABLE 10.3** Development or underdevelopment in sub-Saharan Africa?

PROGRESS	DEPRIVATION
<b>HEALTH</b>	
<p>Between 1960 and 2018, life expectancy at birth increased from 40 to 61 years.</p> <p>In the last two decades, the proportion of the population with access to safe water significantly increased—from 48 per cent in 1990 to 67 per cent in 2015.</p>	<p>There is only 0.23 doctor for every 1,000 people, compared with 1.57 as a world average, and 2.92 in the OECD countries (2017-figures).</p> <p>25.6 million people are infected with HIV, this is just under 70 per cent of all those infected in the world.</p>
<b>EDUCATION</b>	
<p>During the past two decades, adult literacy increased from 53 per cent to 65 per cent.</p> <p>Between 1996 and 2014, the net enrolment ratio at the primary level increased from 57 per cent to 78 per cent, and at the secondary level it increased from 20 per cent to 36 per cent between 1998 and 2018.</p>	<p>At the primary level (6–11 years), 19 per cent of all children are still out of school in 2019.</p> <p>31 per cent of children in 2019 did not complete the primary level.</p>
<b>INCOME AND POVERTY</b>	
<p>Over most of the period 1975–2019, four countries—Botswana, Cape Verde, Lesotho, and Mauritius—had an annual GDP growth rate of more than 3 per cent.</p>	<p>22 per cent or 235 million people were undernourished in 2019, and this number is expected to rise to 412 million people by 2030.</p> <p>40 per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa is living on less than 1.90 dollars a day.</p>
<b>CHILDREN</b>	
<p>Over the past four decades, the infant mortality rate dropped from 155 per thousand live births to 52 in 2019.</p>	<p>In 2019, 31 per cent of children in the region were malnourished, and 14 per cent of babies were underweight in 2015.</p>
<p>Sources: World Bank (2019); Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) (2020); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (2020); UNESCO (2019)</p>	

A second core area of development where the realists–mercantilists strike a balance concerns the market and the state. Economic liberals argue that free market forces and a minimal role for the state are best for the promotion of economic development. Mercantilists reply that there may be serious flaws in the alleged efficiency of the market (Weiss 1988: 177). Yet mercantilists recognize that excessive state intervention can involve ‘bureaucratic failures’ (White 1984: 101) and they do not support the dependency view where there is no significant role at all for market forces. If too much is left to market forces, there is the danger of market failure; for example, monopolies may be created in some areas so that there is no competition among producers; or there may be negative side-effects due to unregulated production, such as pollution. Yet if too much is left to state regulation, the result may be bureaucratic failures that are ‘red tape’ problems of high cost and inefficiency. The actual balance between state and market will vary across societies and within the same society over time (White 1984; Chang 2002). The recent years of prolonged economic crisis in Japan are an indication that after many years of successful growth the political and bureaucratic establishment is unable or unwilling—because there are vested political and economic interests in the current system—to devise new strategies for viable economic development.

Another example of the mercantilist middle road in development thinking concerns the role of TNCs (Rugman and Doh 2008). Economic liberals often see TNCs as ‘engines of growth’, bringing progress and prosperity to the South; dependency theory, in contrast, frequently sees TNCs as ‘the devil incorporated’ (Streeter 1979). Realists–mercantilists note that TNCs can contribute to economic upgrading in developing countries, but only under certain conditions. In weak states with undeveloped local economies, TNCs will totally dominate the host country and that is not helpful for the strengthening of local industry; the TNCs will be local monopolists. In stronger states with some local industry, TNC investment can assist in upgrading local undertakings technologically and otherwise, and thus significantly assist in developing the host economy (Nixson 1988; Dicken 2015). In other words, TNCs on their own will not bring economic development to the South; there has to be a counterweight in the form of local industry and a host government strong enough to oversee TNC activity. We can summarize the modern mercantilist view of development as shown in Box 10.4.

Modern mercantilism in many ways appears to offer a sensible strategy for economic development. Yet it is not without weaknesses. To follow the path advocated by

#### BOX 10.4 Key Concepts: Modern mercantilism

1. It strikes a balance between national autonomy and international integration; i.e., between incorporation into the world market and self-reliance.
2. It strikes a balance between state and market; i.e., between free market forces and state regulation.
3. Foreign direct investment by TNCs can be a strong modernization factor, but only provided that TNCs are counterbalanced by local industry and host government supervision.

modern mercantilists, the states of the South need a fairly high political–administrative capacity; otherwise they will not be able to undertake sophisticated state interventions and regulations of the economy. Even if there are a number of states with such developmental strength in East Asia and elsewhere, it is clear that the majority of states in the South are not very strong (Brock et al. 2011). For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, corrupt and self-interested state elites are part of the development problem rather than part of the solution. Under such circumstances, there is little hope of success for the modern mercantilist strategy. Indeed, mercantilist policies might even lead to greater problems by creating conditions in which corruption can flourish.

It ought to be clear from this brief introduction that the problems concerning development and underdevelopment continue to provoke debate among scholars who hold different theoretical positions. The popularity of the main positions has waxed and waned, yet the development problem remains in place; some 820 million people are chronically malnourished (FAO 2019), and 736 million live on less than \$1.90 per day (World Bank 2019. See also Table 10.3). Economic liberals are right in claiming that a free market economy can be a powerful force promoting growth and modernization; but it is not true that an unregulated market will more or less automatically lead to optimal development for individuals and states in the long run. Dependency theorists have a point when they emphasize how relations of dependence shape and impact progress in the developing world. But they are wrong in claiming that integration in the world market must lead to underdevelopment and that Western countries are no more than imperialist exploiters. Modern mercantilism appears to strike a sensible middle road between state and market, between autonomy and integration. But mercantilists tend to rely too much on prudent manoeuvring by developing world states, many of which are quite weak and are led by self-serving and often highly corrupt elites.

In sum, and not surprisingly, each of the main theoretical positions has insights concerning the development problem, and each has blind spots, as shown in Table 10.4.

**TABLE 10.4** The development problem in theories of IPE

	<b>TRUE CLAIM</b>	<b>FALSE CLAIM</b>
Liberalism	A free market economy promotes growth and development	An unregulated market will lead to the best result for individuals and states
Dependency theory	Dependence shapes development in the Global South	Integration in the world market must lead to underdevelopment
Modern mercantilism	Development benefits from a sensible mix of state and market, autonomy, and integration	Governments are always able to regulate the economy in an optimum fashion



In recent years, the debate on development has grown more complex (Veltmeyer and Bowles 2017; Scholte and Söderbaum 2017). The major theories discussed above claim relevance for development problems everywhere; that is, they are general theories. But there are specific problems in many regions and countries, due to particular historical experiences and variation in local conditions.

The roads taken by today's rising powers are not the same as those of the West. They combine their own peculiar versions of capitalism with political and social systems which are in many ways fundamentally different from the liberal West. China is perhaps the most prominent example of this, but the tendency applies to other modernizers as well. That has opened up a new debate about different models or varieties of capitalist development. The debate began with reflections on types of capitalism in the West (Hall and Soskice 2001); in this part of the world the major distinction is between 'liberal market economies' such as the United States and the United Kingdom, and 'coordinated market economies', for example, Germany and Sweden. But these distinctions will clearly not do when we look at the variety of modernizing states around the world because they differ on several other dimensions. Most importantly, it has become clear that capitalism can be combined with non-democratic rule, a possibility not discussed in relation to Western varieties of capitalism.

There is no agreement about how to categorize the present capitalist diversity in the world. Barry Buzan and George Lawson suggest a typology of four major types of capitalism (Buzan and Lawson 2014; 2015). There are two democratic types, 'liberal democratic capitalism' (e.g., the United States), and 'social democratic' (e.g., Germany), and two non-democratic types, 'competitive authoritarian' (e.g., Russia, Venezuela) and 'state bureaucratic' (e.g., China). Markets dominate in the liberal democratic type; states are highly present in the state bureaucratic type. Charles Kupchan (2012: 86–145) suggests further distinctions among the non-democratic capitalist systems. In addition to 'communal autocracy' (China) and 'paternal autocracy' (Russia), he also includes 'tribal autocracy', where political community is primarily defined by tribe and clan (e.g., the Persian Gulf sheikdoms). Kupchan also identifies 'theocrats' (the Muslim systems in the Middle East) and 'the strongmen' (the African systems with few checks on the power of the leaders), and, finally, 'the populists', made up of the left-wing populist regimes of Latin America.

It is clear that such a great variety of models must affect the discussion about economic development. When the Cold War ended, we thought there was no alternative to the Western model of capitalist development. We must now appreciate that capitalist development can take place in a variety of forms under very different political conditions. The good news is that there are different possible roads to modernity. The bad news is that the non-democratic varieties of capitalism suffer from severe corruption problems and a host of other difficulties that makes it hard to project whether they will be viable systems in the long run. Iversen and Soskice (2019) claim that there are complementarities between democracy and advanced capitalism. They recognize that the initial development of advanced economies—both in the Western world and later in East Asia—was often led by non-democratic forces, for instance semi-authoritarian governments in South Korea and Taiwan which opened themselves to trade and invested hugely in

education. But they argue that the symbiosis between advanced capitalism and liberal democracy make it difficult to stay on the authoritarian pathway. Today, Singapore is the only advanced economy which is not a democracy.

The Chinese economic model, for example, is based on rapid export growth and cheap labour. Export growth of this magnitude cannot continue and the supply of cheap labour is declining. China wants to graduate into high-tech industries, but these activities are heavily dominated by foreign firms and the demand from developed countries is slow. Two fundamental additional downsides of the Chinese model are environmental degradation and increasing inequality. While it is not foreclosed that China could make the move towards the advanced group via authoritarian means, it will be difficult to fully enter this category under the auspices of authoritarian rule. Increasingly, then, there is no simple liberal, realist–mercantilist, or Marxist answer to the development problem. It is rather the case that different countries face their own set of problems. Some have been successful in bringing about economic growth and reducing poverty; in that sense they are no longer ‘traditional’ or even ‘underdeveloped’ societies, but they face a number of development problems anyway. Development is not about finally arriving somewhere and then sitting down to rest; processes of development rather solve some problems while they create others in the process of doing so. In that sense, all countries are developing countries, including the advanced capitalist states that have their own problems, as we shall see in the next section. At the same time, there are a number of fragile states at the bottom, with very serious challenges. They are cases of what may be called ‘blocked development’. That is not a situation of complete stagnation or standstill; it does not mean that nothing ever happens. What it does mean is that attempts at political, economic, and social development are liable to remain erratic, with progress always combined with setbacks (Brock et al. 2011: 43).

## 10.4 What Is Economic Globalization and Who Benefits?

The phenomenon of globalization has received a great deal of attention from IPE. Globalization can be briefly defined as the intensification of economic, social, and cultural relations across borders (Holm and Sørensen 1995: 4; Steger 2017: 15). This means that globalization covers almost everything; it concerns economics, politics, technology, communication, and more. Such a concept is very difficult to theorize; in social science one cannot have a theory about ‘everything’, because different aspects of reality have to be analysed in different ways. So, in order to move on, it is helpful to ‘unpack’ the concept of globalization; that is, to look at different major aspects of it (Holm and Sørensen 1995; Steger 2017). Because this is a chapter on major issues in IPE, we shall concentrate on the economic aspect of globalization, but it should be remembered that this is only one, albeit very important, aspect of globalization. It is related to interdependence, which was discussed in Chapter 4.

A growing level of economic interconnection between two national economies, for example, in the form of more external trade or foreign investment, is one aspect of economic globalization. We might call it ‘intensified interdependence’. True economic globalization, however, involves a qualitative shift towards a world economy that is no

longer based on autonomous national economies; rather, it is based on a consolidated global marketplace for production, distribution, and consumption. In this latter case, the single global economy ‘dominates’ the numerous national economies contained within it (Hirst and Thompson 1992: 199). Some scholars call this process ‘deep integration’ (Dicken 2015), in contrast to intensified interdependence which can be seen as ‘shallow integration’. Deep integration is first and foremost organized by TNCs. They increasingly organize the production of goods and services on a global scale. The various segments of production, from development and design to manufacture and assembly, are each placed in locations that offer the best conditions for that particular segment in terms of labour cost, input availability, proximity of markets, and so on. At the same time, TNCs set up networks with local firms that act as suppliers and subcontractors.

The main theoretical approaches to IPE are in agreement that economic globalization is taking place. But they disagree about the actual content of the process (shallow or deep integration); they also disagree about the consequences of economic globalization for states.

The idea that the Westphalian nation-state is becoming too small for some things and too big for other things in an era of globalization resonates with many economic liberals. They argue that the nation-state is pressured ‘from above’ in the sense that globalization creates cross-border activities which states are no longer able to control on their own—such as global economic transactions and environmental problems. And the nation-state is also pressured ‘from below’: there is a trend towards ever-stronger identification with the local community where people live their daily lives (Archer et al. 2007). The economic liberals’ view of economic globalization and its consequences can be summarized as shown in Box 10.5.

Realists remain unconvinced that a qualitative shift towards a global economic system has taken place. Instead, they see economic globalization as ‘more of the same’: a process of intensified interdependence between national economies. Furthermore, they observe that trade and investment flows between countries were at a very high level before the First World War. As Robert Gilpin (2001: 3), probably the most important realist voice in IPE, put it around the turn of the millennium, ‘the major economic achievement of the post-World War II era has been to restore the level of international economic integration that existed prior to World War I’. In other words, there is little new in the fact of economic interdependence. Realists also reject the claim made by many economic liberals that corporations have lost their national identity in pursuit of their ambition to become truly global economic players. Instead, they argue, states and

#### BOX 10.5 Key Arguments: Economic liberals’ view of globalization

1. Economic globalization means a qualitative shift towards a global economic system.
2. Economic globalization will bring increased prosperity to individuals, families, and companies.
3. The nation-state loses power and influence as it is pressed from above and from below.

their national corporations remain ‘closely linked’ in spite of the massive increase in world trade and investment flows since the end of the Second World War (Kapstein 1993: 502; Mearsheimer 2018; for an overview of the debate, see Dicken 2015).

Realists thus reject the idea that nation-states are being pressured and are somehow losing out in the process of economic globalization. They say liberals fail to take into account the increased capacity of nation-states to respond to the challenges of economic globalization. The technological developments that foster globalization have also helped increase the state’s capacity for regulation and surveillance. States are stronger than ever in their capacity to extract economic surplus, such as taxes, from their citizens. Their ability to control and regulate all kinds of activities in society has also increased dramatically. The long-term trend is towards more, not less, state autonomy. Lastly, the sovereign state remains the preferred form of political organization around the world. No serious competitor has emerged. And in any case, the recent wave of economic globalization has depended on American leadership or even hegemony (Mearsheimer 2018). We can summarize the realist–mercantilist view of economic globalization as shown in Box 10.6.

Another perspective is the neo-Marxist view of economic globalization, which differs from that of both economic liberalism and realism. We shall concentrate on the neo-Marxist contribution of aforementioned Robert Cox, which contains both aspects introduced above. Economic globalization involves both intensified interdependence and a qualitative shift towards a global economy (for a different neo-Marxist analysis of globalization, see Rosenberg 2005; 2016). According to Cox, there is a new global economy that exists alongside the classical capitalist world economy, but the tendency is that the former ‘incrementally supersedes’ the latter (Cox 1994: 48; see also Khanna 2017). Cox finds that in the process of economic globalization nation-states have lost substantial power over the economy. However, the continued process of economic globalization requires the political framework provided by nation-states; in particular, it requires ‘the military-territorial power of an enforcer’ (Cox 1994: 54). The United States has assumed that role. But America is beset by a contradiction between decreasing economic strength and increasing projection of military power on a world scale. Being the world’s ‘policeman’ requires a strong economic base, but that is diminishing under the pressures of economic globalization. The macro-regions (headed by the US in North and South America, by China in East Asia, and by the European Union in Europe) are the

#### BOX 10.6 Key Arguments: The realist–mercantilist view of globalization

1. Economic globalization is ‘more of the same’; i.e., intensified economic interdependence—nothing much new in that.
2. Corporations do not lose their national identities because they are global players; they remain tied to their home countries.
3. The nation-state is not threatened by globalization; the state’s capacity for regulation and surveillance has increased rather than decreased.

new political–economic frameworks of capital accumulation (Acharya 2018). Yet, the macro-regions continue to be part of the larger, global economic system.

Robert Cox and other neo-Marxists thus stress the uneven, hierarchical nature of economic globalization. The global economy is characterized by dependence rather than interdependence. Economic power is increasingly concentrated in the leading industrialized countries, including the United States, Japan, and the states of Western Europe. This means that economic globalization will not benefit the impoverished masses of developing countries. Nor will it improve the living standards of the poor in highly industrialized countries. At the present time, globalization is under pressure in several ways. It began with the financial crisis in 2008, followed by the nationalist Trump presidency 2017–21, and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. We shall return to these events in Chapter 12. We summarize the neo-Marxist view of economic globalization in Box 10.7.

The debate on economic globalization is not easily settled because each of the three theoretical positions outlined above can point to some empirical evidence that supports their views. It is true, as economic liberals claim, that globalization has the potential to bring increased prosperity to individuals and companies; but it is also true, as emphasized by neo-Marxists, that current processes of globalization are uneven and may have little to offer large groups of underprivileged people. Economic liberals are perhaps correct in claiming that globalization is a challenge to the nation-state; but it is equally true, as stressed by realists–mercantilists, that states remain strong players and that they have proved themselves able to adapt to many new challenges. Neo-Marxists correctly emphasize that ‘intensified interdependence’ and the creation of a global economy are simultaneously present. On that issue, however, economic liberals and mercantilists are too one-sided—they emphasize either one or the other aspect of globalization. In sum, we can, again, find useful insights in each of the theoretical positions, but also weak components in each (see Table 10.5).

It is important to understand that the poorest countries—and people—are in difficulty not because of economic surplus being taken from them by the rich; rather, it is because they are marginalized participants in the process of economic globalization. Their markets are not attractive to foreign investors because people’s purchasing power is low; political institutions are inefficient and corrupt, so there is a lack of stability and political order.

There is a clear relationship between measures of inequality and progress in terms of industrialization. When industrialization began in earnest in Western Europe in the

### BOX 10.7 Key Concepts: The neo-Marxist view of globalization

1. Economic globalization is both ‘intensified interdependence’ and the creation of a global economy.
2. Nation-states remain important regulators of globalization, but they are losing power over the economy. In response, they form macro-regions.
3. Economic globalization is an uneven, hierarchical process, where economic power is increasingly concentrated in leading industrialized countries.

**TABLE 10.5** Economic globalization and theories of IPE

	<b>TRUE CLAIM</b>	<b>FALSE CLAIM</b>
Economic liberalism	Economic globalization has the potential to bring increased prosperity to all  Economic globalization challenges the state	Economic globalization benefits everybody  Economic globalization spells the demise of the state
Realist–mercantilism	States adapt to challenges of economic globalization States remain strong players	States are in full control of economic globalization Economic globalization is merely more interdependence
Neo-Marxism	Economic globalization is an uneven, hierarchical process	Economic globalization benefits only a tiny minority

nineteenth century, the gap between the richest and the poorest fifth in the world was not very large; it stood at 3 to 1 in 1820. Today, the gap is much more dramatic; it stood at 74 to 1 at the turn of the century (UNDP 1999: 3). The richest 1 per cent took home over 20 per cent of the global income in 2016; the bottom 50 per cent had a share of less than 10 per cent (Inequality.org. 2020).

Meanwhile, the debate about inequality has focused increasingly on the richest part of the world, the advanced capitalist countries in North America and Europe. It comes in the wake of the financial crisis that broke in 2008. The crisis began with a ‘housing bubble’ in the United States: when the high real estate prices started dropping, people could no longer refinance their mortgages, triggering a financial collapse. Behind this was a neoliberal period of lax regulation where financial institutions had perverse incentives to ‘take excessive risk when financial markets are buoyant’ (Crotty 2009: 564); that is, to maximize the flow of loans whether they were sound or not in order to profit from sales and mortgage securitization. At the same time, a ‘derivatives bubble’ emerged on the basis of financial products so complex and opaque they could not be priced correctly because the connection between the paper and the underlying real value could no longer be pinned down (Wade 2008). Financial profits were huge: the US financial sector is responsible for only 5 per cent of total employment; but at its peak, in 2004, it accounted for 40 per cent of total profits (Weissmann 2013).

In the US, the 1 per cent richest took home about 9 per cent of total income in the mid-1970s; today, they take home more than 23 per cent. Meanwhile, huge sections of the middle class have stood still (Fukuyama 2012). The old American dream of working one’s way up has been shattered: today, access to capital gains is much more lucrative than hard work (Piketty 2014).

These asymmetries have been further exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020. As McNamara and Newman (2020: E67) point out, the ‘virus thus puts into stark relief the structural inequality that has resulted from globalization—the radically and racially different lived experiences within states and across them’. First, some countries—such as New Zealand and South Korea—have been much more effective in responding to the pandemic than others, such as Brazil or India. Second, within many countries the pandemic has had huge costs on the livelihoods of the poor, whereas the rich have been much less affected, whether we talk about health or economics. Many jobs have been lost, particularly in relatively low-paid service sectors such as tourism, at a time when stocks and housing have soared to record price levels.

These developments have sparked a new debate about the benefits and downsides of economic globalization (Collier 2018; McNamara and Newman 2020). Dani Rodrik argues that we cannot pursue the current version of economic globalization and simultaneously uphold democracy and national determination. If what he calls hyperglobalization continues, the only way to preserve democracy is to create a strong form of global governance, even a world state. That is not realistic, or even desirable, in Rodrik’s view, because the vast majority of people want to maintain their attachment to the nation-state. His suggestion is instead that hyperglobalization is reined in and replaced by a less freewheeling system of economic exchange which is better regulated and in more harmony with national economic and political objectives (Rodrik 2011). Iversen and Soskice (2019) challenge this view. They argue that the advanced democracies are in the driver’s seat of globalization and benefit from it. ‘The “laws” of capitalism driving wealth accumulation are in fact politically and, largely, democratically manufactured’ as they put it (Iversen and Soskice 2019: 2). The reason is that liberal democracy empowers the aspirational middle class, which normally delivers the ‘decisive voter’. As long as a substantial proportion of voters are aspirational—or even just have aspirations of upward social mobility for their children—democracy will produce policies which keep economies being attractive for capital; so attractive that international capital loses its bargaining power. This explains what Iversen and Soskice see as the remarkable ability of advanced capitalist democracies to allow—for more than a century—the painful process that the Austrian economist Joseph A. Schumpeter (1911) termed ‘creative destruction’, that is, the gradual abandonment of old firms, industries, and sectors as technology and trade patterns change. But even Iversen and Soskice grant that the US political system is increasingly broken and no longer effectively under the sway of the aspirational middle class.

This re-ignites the discussion about economic globalization among the major theoretical perspectives: to which extent should our view of globalization be informed by liberal, mercantilist, or Neo-Marxist views? One way of approaching this problem is theoretical eclecticism; that is, the combination of insights from different theories in order to construct new frameworks to analyse the complexities of IPE. A book by Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein (2010) introduces this way of theorizing in their review of five studies in IPE (see Box 10.8). On this view, we need a variety of different theories in order to understand the complex interplay between economics and politics.



**BOX 10.8** Key Concepts: Theoretical eclecticism in IPE

The five studies [considered here] collectively make a strong case for the promise of eclecticism in analysing different facets of the global political economy. Seabrooke offers a novel analysis that connects domestic politics to states' relative position in global finance. Sinclair examines the various mechanisms and processes through which rating agencies have acquired power in the global financial system. Woll enquires into the changes in politics and perceptions accompanying the liberalization of telecommunications and air transport. Jabko studies the evolution of a distinctive political strategy that enabled key actors to promote market liberalization while engineering support for supranational governance structures. And Stubbs explores the connections between war-fighting and preparations for war, on the one hand, and the dynamic growth experienced by seven East Asian economies, on the other.

**Sil and Katzenstein (2010: 148)**

## 10.5 IPE: How to Study the Real World?

The last issue in IPE we cover in this chapter concerns how to approach and analyse the real world. We take note of the 'transatlantic divide' identified by Cohen (2008, see also Keohane 2009). This pits the hard science school of American IPE against the more qualitative and normative school of British IPE.<sup>2</sup> (See Table 10.6).

The American School was created by a number of pioneering works published in the 1970s and 1980s, some of which we have already mentioned (Cohen 2008; 2019). Most important was Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's (1977) work on 'complex interdependence' and Charles Kindleberger's (1973) and Robert Gilpin's (1975; 1987) 'hegemonic stability theory'. Keohane and Nye introduced the notion of 'complex interdependence' as a liberal counterpoint to the realist view of international relations (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). The main aim of this new ideal type was to understand how the increased connectedness of domestic economies shaped international relations in a world where American hegemony was waning. Gilpin (1975; 1987) addressed the same development from a realist perspective; in that sense, he brought realism into IPE.

The American School got a further boost in the 1980s with its work on system governance. The notion of international regimes was introduced to explain how, in the absence of a hegemonic stabilizer, institutions governing global economic relations could be created and maintained. Stephen Krasner (1983) led the way but others, including Keohane (1984), quickly followed his lead. Meanwhile, Peter Katzenstein (1977) broadened the research agenda of the American School by attempting to pry

<sup>2</sup> Cohen (2019) adds a number of other schools, including 'America's Left-Out' of neo-Marxist IPE and a Canadian and Australian school, but the contrast between the American and the British Schools remains the most important.



**TABLE 10.6** The British and American Schools compared

	<b>AMERICAN SCHOOL</b>	<b>BRITISH SCHOOL</b>
<b>Nature of inquiry</b>	Problem solving (understanding how economic policies are formulated and realized and under what conditions they lead to efficient outcomes)	Critical theory (identifying unfair economic outcomes and discussing fair solutions)
<b>Theory</b>	Formal theorizing using models imported from Economics  Interests deduced from Economics but realized within the constraints created by political institutions	More informal theorizing inspired by, for example, Marxism  Normative, eclectic, and multidisciplinary
<b>Methodology</b>	Positivist hypothesis-testing, normally via quantitative methods	Historical and interpretative, normally via qualitative methods
<b>Key focus</b>	State-centred focus on the domestic formulation of specific economic policies and international bargaining over them	Centred on non-state actors and big questions of historical transformation such as globalization

Based on Cohen (2008; 2019)

open the black box of the state in order to understand how domestic factors shaped foreign policy. In the 1990s, this led to the formulation of the so-called Open Economy Politics (OEP) framework, on which most American IPE today is premised, and which we flesh out in this section.

The British School can be dated to a particular publication, namely Susan Strange's 1970-article 'International Economics and International Relations: A Case of Mutual Neglect'. Besides Strange, the towering figure of the British School is the Canadian scholar Robert Cox, whose work we have already introduced (see Box 10.9). Strange's and Cox's work differ very much from that of American School scholars such as Keohane, Gilpin, Krasner, and Katzenstein. Strange favoured an eclectic approach that enabled scholars to draw on different theoretical perspectives and to use different methods, normally in a very informal way, all the while keeping their critical faculties alert when diagnosing the state of events in the world. She also spurned the American state-centric and formalistic paradigm (see Zürn 2002). Cox was inspired by Marxism, especially the Italian Marxist and politician Antonio Gramsci, and his work addresses long-term historical developments. Following the lead of Strange and Cox, the British

### BOX 10.9 Key Thinkers of IPE

- According to Benjamin Cohen (2008), a group of scholars active from the late 1960s and onwards are the 'Magnificent Seven' of modern IPE. They are: Robert Cox, Susan Strange, Charles Kindleberger, Robert Gilpin, Peter Katzenstein, Robert Keohane, and Stephen Krasner.
- The 'American School' today, prominent representatives: David Lake, Helen Milner, Beth Simmons, Peter Hall, and David Soskice.
- The 'British School' today, prominent representatives: Ben Rosamond, Matthew Watson, Ronen Palan, Leonard Seabrooke, and John Ravenhill.

School is much more qualitative, multidisciplinary, and normative than the American School (Berry 2020; Clift and Rosamond 2009; Sharman and Weaver 2013).

The American School's methodology is described by Krasner as follows: 'International political economy is deeply embedded in the standard methodology of the social sciences which, stripped to its bare bones, simply means stating a proposition and testing it against external evidence' (quoted in Cohen 2008: 4). Since the 1990s, this hard science model has been based on the so-called open economy politics (OEP) framework. OEP can be situated within the liberal tradition of IPE (Farrell and Finnemore 2009), which it combines with an emphasis on formal models, empirical rigour and quantitative analysis, much inspired by Economics. It deduces interests from economic theory, it draws on formal models of theorizing, and it is based on subjecting theoretical propositions to sophisticated quantitative analysis (Lake 2009). The OEP edifice consists of three building blocks (Cohen 2008; 2019):

1. The interests of relevant domestic actors (e.g., companies or domestic sectors of the economy) are deduced from economic theory.
2. The aggregation and mediation of these interests are understood via institutional theories imported from Political Science (for instance, theories concerning different institutions in democracies and autocracies or different institutions in different kinds of democracies, say, presidential versus parliamentary systems);
3. Bargaining models are used to understand the outcomes of international negotiations, given these domestic interests.

The OEP framework is used to analyse how countries formulate economic policies and try to realize these via international negotiations (Cohen 2019: 20). Most of the work done by the American School today therefore deals with very specific issues such as 'trade policy, monetary and financial relations, foreign direct investment, migration, foreign aid, natural resources, and environmental policy' in advanced economies (Cohen 2019: 20). By contrast, global developments are played down, a situation deplored by many observers (Cohen 2008: 79). To illustrate, we can return to the issue about underdevelopment in the Global South, which has received short shrift in much mainstream American IPE. Instead, focus has been placed on the triad of industrialized countries in

North America, Western Europe, and East Asia (Gilpin 2001: 10; see also Seabrooke and Young 2017; Keohane 1984: 6), for two main reasons. First, the data on advanced economies is both better and more plentiful than for developing countries, meaning that it is easier to carry out sophisticated quantitative analysis (Cohen 2019: 145). Second, the developing world is considered less important for what happens in the global economy.

The British School has so far eschewed the constraints imposed by such a hard science model. Following Strange and Cox, British IPE is deliberately eclectic and multidisciplinary and keen to undertake historical analysis of macro developments. It is also emphatically normative and critical of the inequities of the present international economic system (Cox 1981: 128). These are probably key reasons why Strange's and Cox's work has had so little traction in American IPE. The lack of rigour in their theoretical and empirical work is seen as unscientific by many US scholars (Cohen 2008: 51, 91).

In 2009, these issues were debated in a special issue of the *Review of International Political Economy*, with contributions from, among others, Keohane (2009) and Katzenstein (2009). Most authors pay tribute to the progress achieved within the stringent OEP framework. But several contributions also reflect critically on what Kathleen R. McNamara (2009) terms the current IPE 'monoculture'. One aspect of this monoculture is a lack of focus on ideas; interests are not purely material, they are also influenced by 'the ideas that people have in their heads' (Keohane 2009: 38). Another problem is that current American IPE fails to ask 'big questions about change' (Keohane 2009: 38–42) including the rise of China, the volatility of the global capitalist economy and importance of the transformation towards a digitalized economy. Robert Keohane summarizes the dilemma between real-world relevance and scientific stringency as follows:

Normatively, I value the critical spirit of British IPE, and of Susan Strange and Robert Cox, because, like them, I am unwilling to accept the contemporary political-economic system as either natural or good. Injustice and inequality are endemic to IPE. But I also value the discipline of social science, as reflected in American IPE, which seeks to separate value judgments from positive analysis. I believe that in the long run, social scientists can have a more positive impact on the human condition through rigorous, persuasive analysis than through subjective criticism. But for us to help improve the human condition, we need to reflect on the big questions.

**Keohane (2009: 43)**

The present American hard science model is very different from the work done by the founding fathers of American IPE. In *After Hegemony*, Keohane underlined that the research question he posed was 'particularly hard, perhaps impossible, to investigate with scientific rigor. No sensible person would choose it as a topic of investigation on the grounds that its puzzles could readily be solved' (1984: 10). Keohane and Nye (2012: xvii), in the preface to the first edition of *Power and Interdependence*, noted that '[w]e try to quantify what we can, but we stress theory over method'. For Keohane and Nye, complex interdependence is an ideal type, not an actual description of reality. Reality always falls somewhere between complex interdependence and the realist ideal type described by Waltz (Keohane and Nye 2012: 265; see also Chapter 4).

Why has the hard science model won out in the American School? American IPE was created by political scientists, not by economists, and it continues to be dominated by

political scientists. But in recent decades economics has become extremely important with respect to theorizing and methodology (Cohen 2008: 12–13). Cohen (2008: 82–3; 2014: 29) argues that this ‘creeping economism’ has made it almost impossible to pose big questions: ‘inquiry must be disaggregated in order to make it analytically tractable’ (82). The sceptical view of this development is expressed in the old adage that ‘scientists are people who know more and more about less and less’.

The hard science model has widened the ‘transatlantic divide’ identified by Cohen (2008). There was always a difference between the mainstream political science character of American IPE and the much broader, multidisciplinary character of British IPE. Strange, inspired by the Marxist notion that society has to be studied as a whole, argued that IR was a part of IPE rather than the other way around, and she saw IPE as a broad form of sociology. But the increasing rigour of the American School has dramatically magnified these differences. Where American IPE is all about identifying causes of specific empirical developments via cutting-edge quantitative methods, the British school is unashamed about taking a normative or critical approach (Cohen 2019: 51). With respect to both theorizing and methods, it is much more fragmented and it has no common analytical framework to match the OEP model of the American School (Cohen 2019: 63). It also continues to grapple with ‘big questions’ about historical transformation.

To see how these differences in approaching the real world matter, we can return to the issue of the nature of globalization. The British School is very preoccupied with globalization; as briefly mentioned in Chapter 6 some scholars working within this tradition refer not to IPE but to GPE, ‘Global Political Economy’ (Ravenhill 2020). ‘For the mainstream of the American school, however, globalization is little more than old wine in a new bottle—complex interdependence redux’ (Cohen 2008: 172; see also Keohane and Nye 2012: xxiii; Gilpin 2001: 3). Indeed, some scholars working within the American School dismiss much of the present talk about globalization as ‘globaloney’ or even ‘globalooney’. This has much to do with the state-centric position of American IPE (Cohen 2019: 15–16). The founding fathers of American IPE—whether realists such as Gilpin or liberals such as Keohane—concurred that states were principal actors in international relations and that their interests shaped economic relations, and they maintain that view even today.

This sceptical attitude to globalization is telling in a more general respect. As Cohen (2008) points out, the American School, originally sparked by the ‘Really Big Question’ of system transformation in international economic affairs, is increasingly disinclined to pose big questions. There is today a fundamental difference between the middle-range theory ambitions of the American School, based on the OEP framework and focusing on particular domestic-level explanatory factors, and the macro-level theoretical ambitions we find in much of the British School.

## 10.6 Integrating International and Domestic Factors

The classical theories of IPE that we dealt with in Chapter 6 either emphasize national or international factors. Dependency theory concerns relations in the international system. Economic liberalism concerns processes (broadly speaking modernization processes) that take place at the national level, as does mercantilism with its focus on how

economics plays second fiddle to politics, and should be subordinated to the national interest. However, IPE is a field of inquiry that lends itself very much to bridging the ‘outside-inside’ divide. McNamara (2009: 72) puts it well: ‘By its very nature, international political economy (IPE) investigates the juxtaposition of opposing logics, and the interaction of complex dynamics across multiple national, subnational and international political arenas.’

Nonetheless, modern IPE was born as what Waltz (1959) termed a ‘third image theory’, that is, one which is based solely on international factors (see Chapter 2). Both Keohane and Nye (1977) and Keohane (1984) emphasized that the bulk of their theorizing took place at the level of the international system. Indeed, Keohane (1984: 25–6) explicitly endorsed Waltz’s notion that an IR theory must take an ‘outside-in’ perspective as the starting point. Gilpin’s (1987) *The Political Economy of International Relations*, too, as he later conceded, ‘lacked an adequate domestic dimension’ (Gilpin 2001: 3).

Of course, British IPE was always much broader and therefore more prone to combine causal factors. But within this tradition, there has been little attempt to systematically integrate international and domestic factors into a coherent explanatory framework: eclecticism has ruled that out (see Mahoney and Snyder 1999). Scholars within American IPE have worked in a much more sustained way to remedy the third image reductionism. Keohane and Nye (2012: 272) later regretted ‘how our acceptance for research purposes of the system-unit distinction weakened the prospects for a deeper analysis of complex interdependence’ and called for more emphasis on the link between domestic and international politics. Gilpin’s (2001: 20) later work emphasizes ‘the importance of the national system of political economy in determining the economic behavior of individual states’.

As mentioned earlier and in Chapter 7, Katzenstein led the way in the attempt to open the black box of the state, at least in American IPE, by studying the ‘domestic sources of foreign economic policy’ (Cohen 2008: 119). His book *Power and Plenty* from 1977 provided a strong signal, and today the cutting edge in American IPE is to study international-domestic interactions. ‘For the American school, the international-domestic frontier is where the action is’ (Cohen 2019: 18). At the same time, American IPE has done this by tilting the inquiry in the direction of domestic factors. Much research therefore centres on the formulation of specific policies in areas such as ‘agricultural subsidies, exchange rates, or the taxation of foreign investment’ (Cohen 2008: 129). While this research has attempted to combine domestic and international variables in quite sophisticated ways, it is very reductionist. For instance, it normally considers non-domestic influences as exogenous—that is, to simplify reality it disregards them when making the theoretical argument—in order to hone in on particular domestic factors. This has been termed the ‘reductionist gamble’ of American IPE (Cohen 2019: 32) and it has been criticized for ignoring how international influences affect domestic policies in order to focus squarely on the ‘domestic determinants of foreign economic policies’ (Reiter 2015: 493).

Our position is that much current research in IPE is a good example of how to combine international and domestic factors in IR. But we also note that there is a danger of

doing this in an overly narrow and reductionist way, based on the need to hold factors constant which should rather be part of the theorizing and assessed empirically. The main problem of American IPE is that domestic influences are overemphasized whereas international influences are slighted, or at least downplayed. Other theories, including dependency theory, do the opposite and overemphasize the international dimension. Reductionism may have analytical advantages, but it also comes at a risk of ignoring the bigger picture. The big question today, we shall argue in Chapter 12, is whether the world is heading towards ‘world order’ or ‘world chaos’. The American School, with its focus on making inquiry empirically tractable to allow formal theorizing and quantitative analysis, has little to say on the issue. Those who defend this type of analysis will probably retort that such a ‘big question’ cannot lend itself to rigorous scientific analysis and any answer to it must therefore be based on speculation or even political convictions. As a student of international affairs, you should contemplate your own position in this debate.

## 10.7 Conclusion

The issues of wealth and poverty raised by IPE are of increasing importance in world politics. The traditional focus of IR is on war and peace. But the danger of war between states, particularly great-power war, appears to be in decline for reasons discussed elsewhere in this book. Violent conflict nowadays takes place mainly inside states, especially inside weak states. That violence is bound up with problems of development and underdevelopment, one of the core issues in IPE; in other words, even when we look at the traditional key issue of IR, that of armed conflict, IPE is of increasing importance. IPE also addresses the issue of sovereign statehood: the national economy is a crucially important resource base for the nation-state. When national economies are being integrated into a global economy in the course of economic globalization, the basis of modern statehood might be expected to change in significant ways. As indicated above, that raises new problems concerning the relationship of states and markets and the ability of states to control and regulate the process of economic globalization. IPE opens up several new research agendas, some of which move away from IR as traditionally understood. Such themes as ‘international business’, ‘micro- and macro-economics’, ‘economic geography’, ‘international finance and banking’, and ‘economic history’ are all part of IPE. Such research paths are a good reminder that IR involves a host of other issues studied by additional sub-disciplines of the vast area of social science.

We have been able to introduce only some of the major issues discussed in IPE. What we call ‘economic liberalism’ is a discipline in its own right, comprising the study of micro- and macro-economics (Ravenhill 2020). Marxism is a vast theoretical edifice with many different empirical orientations and a variety of schools. The literature on hegemonic stability, development, and underdevelopment in the developing world, and on economic globalization has grown to immense proportions with a large number of different contributions. However, we do believe that we have singled out the most important issues and debates.

## ✱ Key points

- We focus on four large issues. The first concerns power and the relationship between politics and economics. Is politics in charge of economics or is it the other way around? The second is about development and underdevelopment in the developing world. Is development under way everywhere? The third concerns the nature and extent of economic globalization; who drives the process and who benefits from it? The fourth concerns how to approach and analyse IPE problems: should formal rigour and quantitative analysis be preferred over qualitative analysis with focus on the big questions?
- Who has power in the world today and thus drives the major changes in the global economy? In terms of the strongest portfolio of power resources, the United States remains the leading state. But power is also about the ability and willingness to take on the role of enlightened leadership and thus put the power resources to good use. Here, the US is lacking and for that reason several observers argue that there is a crisis in the world economy.
- There is evidence that international cooperation can be institutionalized via so-called international 'regimes'. These regimes can be created by a hegemon, such as the United States did after the Second World War. But they can also be brought into being and maintained by a larger group of states. Furthermore, after they have been created, they often have a staying power of their own.
- The issues of wealth and poverty raised by IPE are of increasing importance in world politics. The traditional focus of IR is on war and peace; but the danger of war between states appears to be in decline. Violent conflict nowadays takes place mainly inside states, especially inside weak states. That violence is intimately bound up with problems of development and underdevelopment, one of the core issues in IPE. At the same time, today's rising powers are not copies of the West and there is a fresh debate about different versions of capitalism in the world.
- There is a striking difference between American and British IPE, both concerning theory and method, and concerning whether they apply a critical perspective or not. This difference can be traced back to the respective 'founding fathers' of American and British IPE. At the same time, this 'transatlantic divide' has increased since the 1990s as a hard science model has prevailed in American IPE.

## ? Questions

- Is there support for the claim that a hegemon is needed in order to create a liberal world economy? If so, is a hegemon also needed to maintain a liberal world economy?
- What are international regimes and how are they created? Were international regimes also an important part of the so-called 'first wave of globalization' before the First World War?
- Is the United States currently the leading power in the world? In which fields is the US strong and in which areas is it weak?
- What is 'soft power' and which countries have it?

- Should IPE pose Big Questions about historical transformations or should it focus on more particular issues of e.g., agricultural subsidies, exchange rates, and trade policy?
- Define the development problem in the developing/postcolonial world and discuss how it should be analysed. Which theory is most helpful?
- Can the development problem be solved for all countries?
- What are the pros and cons of different varieties of capitalism? Discuss with reference to two or three examples.
- What is economic globalization? What are the benefits and drawbacks of economic globalization? Does globalization mark a qualitative change or is it simply increased interdependence?
- Dani Rodrik wants to seriously modify the current model of economic globalization; Iversen and Soskice defend it. As advisor to the UN, which model would you support and why?
- What are the pros and cons of the hard science model of IPE?
- This chapter has presented four major issues of IPE. Which other issues do you think should be discussed by IPE scholars and why?

### Guide to further reading

- Barnett, M., and Finnemore, M. (2004). *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics*. London: Cornell University Press.
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## CHAPTER 11

# Major Issues in IR: Climate Change, Terrorism, Religion, Power and Hegemony

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### Summary

This chapter discusses four of the most important contemporary issues in IR: climate change; international terrorism; religion; and the balance of power in world history. Some of these issues were evident earlier, but for several reasons they stand higher on the agenda today. The chapter further discusses the different ways in which these issues are analysed by the various theories presented in this book.

## 11.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses four of the most important issues raised by current events; we could have chosen other issues, but these are sufficient to illustrate how different issues can enter the discipline and challenge its theoretical focus. An issue in IR is a topic which is considered to be important in terms of both values and theory. Values come into the picture because the decision about what is important and what is not is always based on certain values. Theory comes in because arguing in favour of an issue must derive from some theoretical idea that this issue is important for the study of IR. For these reasons, raising new issues often involves new approaches to IR.

The discussion of issues will proceed in the following way. First, we shall examine what the issue is about in empirical terms. What are the problems raised and why are they claimed to be important? Second, we shall consider the relative significance of the issue on the agenda of IR. Finally, we shall discuss the nature of the theoretical challenge that the issues present to IR and the different ways in which classical and contemporary theories handle the analysis of these issues (see Box 11.1).

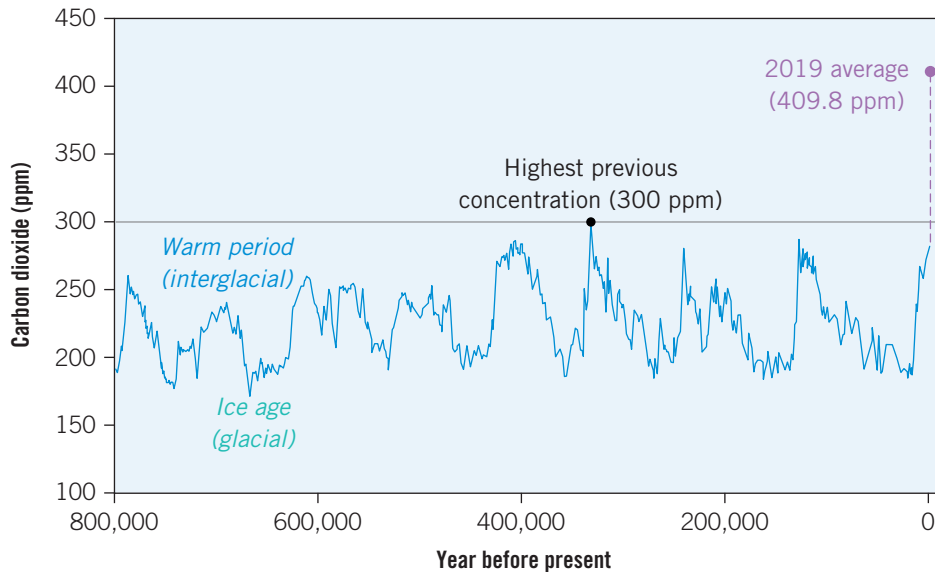
We start with climate change, proceed to international terrorism and religion, and end with balance and hegemony in world history. The order of presentation is not an indication that one issue is more important than another. The introduction to concrete issues will necessarily have to be brief; we urge you to consult the guide to further reading at the end of the chapter for references to in-depth treatment of a particular issue.

## 11.2 Climate Change

Only a few decades ago, in the early 1980s, we were living in fear of imminent nuclear annihilation. That remains a risk today, but it seems fair to say that it is not a serious concern for most people. Another enormous threat has replaced nuclear holocaust,

### BOX 11.1 Key Arguments: Current issues in IR: climate change, international terrorism, religion, balance and hegemony in world history

1. Concrete content of the issue: what is it we should study and why?
2. Relative significance of the issue: how important is it?
3. Nature of theoretical challenge: how is the issue handled by the major theories and approaches?

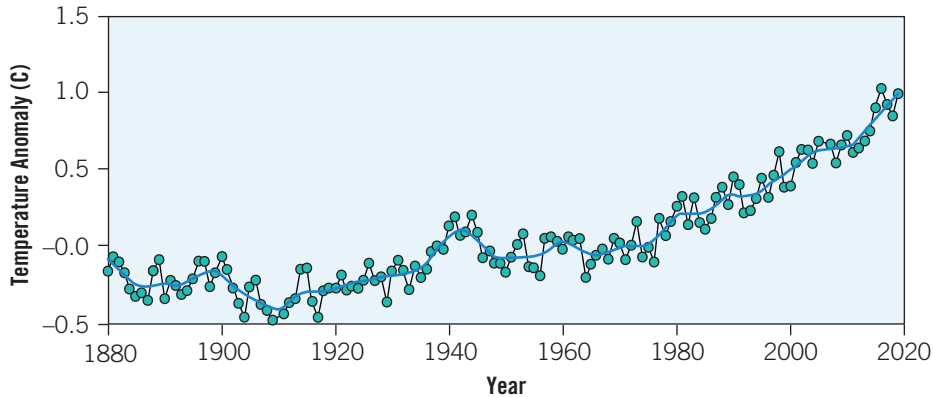
**FIGURE 11.1** Carbon dioxide over 800,000 years

Graph by NOAA Climate.gov based on data from Lüthi et al. 2008, via NOAA NCEI Paleoclimatology Program. See <https://climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide>.

namely the danger of environmental catastrophe, potentially culminating in an Earth unfit for human life. Most pressing are concerns about the consequences of climate change in the form of global warming, unleashed by human emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs), in particular, carbon dioxide, in the period since the Industrial Revolution (see Figures 11.1 and 11.2).

If security and global economics are the two major traditional issue areas in world politics, some scholars now claim that the climate has emerged as a third major issue area (O'Neill 2009; Chasek et al. 2010: 1; Paterson 2013; Grieco, Ikenberry, and Mastanduno 2015: Ch. 12; Heywood 2014: Ch. 16). One reflection of this prominence is the development of a new body of critical theory, termed '*green theory*', which is based on the notion that an imminent ecological crisis will reshape global politics and make much of what we thought we knew about international relations irrelevant (Goodin 2013; Paterson 2013: 267; Dyer 2017). It follows that climate change forces us to rethink our approaches to IR, both in a substantial and in a normative sense (see Corry and Stevenson 2017). The environment will be the new arena for international conflict and cooperation, and if we do not factor it in, we miss out on much of the action in our substantive analyses. Normatively, the implications of climate change in terms of risk exposure, responsibility, and cost and damage to different societies are so enormous that we can no longer pretend that the environment is simply an object of analysis.

Some critics argue that aspects of environmental degradation sit uncomfortably with the dominant approaches to IR. The most important problem concerns whether IR should address the deeper causes of climate change or solely enter at the point where the damage has been done and the issue emerges in international negotiations. As

**FIGURE 11.2** Global surface temperatures 1880–2020

Note: This figure has been made by NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS). Credit: NASA/GISS. See <https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/global-temperature/>.

Newell (2013: Ch. 3) puts it, 'understanding environmental problems and politics from the point at which they enter the remit of global institutions is to neglect the prior political and material relations that account for the production of environmental harm'.

We mainly emphasize the challenges that international actors, most importantly states, face when attempting to mitigate climate change, but we return to the debate about the deeper causes of climate change at the end of our discussion of this issue. We first review what natural scientists have to say, not only about our current predicament, but also about the kind of international response that is needed to avert catastrophic climate changes in the new millennium. We then ask to what extent this kind of international response has occurred so far, and discuss to what extent it is likely in the future, based on IR theories.

### 11.2.1 What Does Climate Science Say?

There is by now a solid historical record documenting that anthropogenic (human-made) global warming is a reality (Maslin 2014). However, forecasting *future* climate change is difficult because the environment is a complex causal system. For instance, some of the great 'ifs' of climate change concern what will happen in the Northern hemisphere when the ice cap melts. Will this release carbon stacked in the frozen tundra of Siberia, further reinforcing GHG emissions? Will it mean that less sunlight is reflected back in space as white snow is replaced by dark water, further increasing the 'greenhouse effect'? And might the release of great amounts of cold fresh water from the Greenland ice cap weaken the Gulf Stream, paradoxically lowering temperatures in Northwestern Europe so that Great Britain could end up with a climate similar to the one that characterizes Svalbard (between Norway and Greenland) today?

This complexity has several important implications for scientific models that predict climate change. First, it means that processes of climate change can rarely be connected

to specific events, such as a particularly cold winter or a particularly hot summer, an outburst of forest fire in e.g., California or Australia, a terrible hurricane season over the Atlantic, a shattering drought in Africa south of the Sahara, or a devastating flood in Bangladesh. All these things recur naturally. What scientists can try to do is to connect climate change to broader patterns of change, such as general increases in average summer temperatures or a higher incidence of hurricanes or droughts in certain areas over extended periods of time.

Second, it also means that scientific models of climate change are constantly being updated based on new data. Our knowledge about the consequences of global warming is therefore uncertain at any point in time, but this uncertainty tends to decrease over time. This explains why new scientific assessments—such as those produced by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (see Box 11.2)—often show that prior research has underestimated the likelihood of future temperature rises and the consequences of these changes for the global climate.

The inherent uncertainty in complex natural systems notwithstanding, there is today undisputed evidence that the planet has become warmer since 1880, with a hike in recent decades (see Figure 11.2; Box 11.3), and there is scientific agreement that this warming is mainly due to human activities releasing GHGs into the atmosphere. This global warming is causing a series of threatening developments, including melting ice caps in Greenland and Antarctica, changes in deep-ocean circulation, and the potential dieback of the Amazon rainforest (Maslin 2014). Moreover, while specific storms or floods cannot be attributed to global warming, ‘there is accumulating evidence for ever-greater numbers of extreme weather events’ (McGuire 2005: 34). There is also some evidence that global biodiversity is declining at an alarming pace, though it is hard to conclusively connect outright mass extinctions of species to global warming (Wignall 2019). Our current age has, on this basis, been named ‘The Anthropocene’, that is, the period of Earth’s existence when humans have had a significant, and often crushing, impact on ecosystems and geology.

### BOX 11.2 Key Developments: The IPCC

The IPCC was founded in 1988 by the UN and the World Meteorological Organization to provide a scholarly consensus about global warming. The IPCC does this by reviewing and summarizing the existing climate science about whether global warming is taking place and, if so, what its likely consequences are. The IPCC has so far issued five reports (1990, 1996, 2001, 2007, 2014), with a sixth report due to be fully released in 2022. Already the fourth report in 2007 declared that there was a 90 per cent likelihood that humans are causing the increases in global temperatures that have been registered since genuine scientific measurements began one-and-a-half centuries ago (see Figure 11.2). In 2008, the IPCC received the Nobel Peace Prize together with former American Vice President Al Gore for their efforts to bring about an awareness of the challenges presented by global warming.

**BOX 11.3** Key Developments: Climate change

Since 1880, the global average surface temperature has increased by 0.85 °C. This warming has been accompanied by a significant warming of the ocean, a rise in sea level of 20 centimetres (cm), a 40 per cent decline in Arctic sea ice, and an increase in the number of extreme weather events. As we emit more and more carbon into the atmosphere, the effects on climate change will increasingly threaten and challenge human society . . . Scientists are predicting that by continuing on our current carbon emissions pathway, we could warm the planet by between 2.8 and 5.6 °C in the next 85 years, which economists suggest could cost us as much as 20 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP).

**Maslin (2014: 11–12)**

We know for a fact that humans have affected the environment before; American political scientist James C. Scott goes so far as to backdate the transition to what he calls the ‘thin’ Anthropocene to the time—around 400,000 years ago—where hominids (*Homo erectus*) first learned to use fire (Scott 2017: 2–3). Turning to our own subspecies of hominids, there is compelling evidence that stone-age humans exterminated the great Ice Age Megafauna (e.g., mastodons, mammoths, and woollen rhinos) in the Americas, Australia, and most of Eurasia after leaving Africa (and they probably also went after their relatives, the Neanderthals). We may be on the verge of consigning the remaining megafauna (e.g., elephants, rhinos, giraffes, etc.) in Africa and Asia to a similar fate (Wignall 2019).

Natural scientists have shown that some regions of the world are much more vulnerable to climate change than other areas. Most exposed are certain island groups in the Pacific, which risk being engulfed by the sea, and coastal areas and river deltas in e.g. South Eastern Asia (including much of Vietnam and Bangladesh), which will be regularly visited by devastating floods as sea levels rise due to the melting of the ice caps. Considering that global warming is largely a consequence of the industrialization of the developed countries in the industrial North, it adds insult to injury that most of the negative consequences are likely to be borne by the developing countries in the Global South (see Boxes 11.4 and 11.5) (Grieco, Ikenberry, and Mastanduno 2015: 395). To make matters worse, poor countries with low state capacity and weak civil societies will have a much harder time responding or adapting to climate changes than developed countries (McGuire 2005: 37).

There is another paradox layered on top of this. Effective responses to climate change, in the form of lower emissions of carbon dioxide, require that developing countries commit to binding targets, even though today’s global warming is largely the consequence of historic levels of emissions in the developed countries since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (see Figures 11.3 and 11.4). Already in 2007, China surpassed the US as the biggest emitter, though if measured per capita, the US still has the clear lead. Any climate deal that makes a real change will thus have to limit emissions in

**BOX 11.4** Key Developments: The inequality of carbon emissions

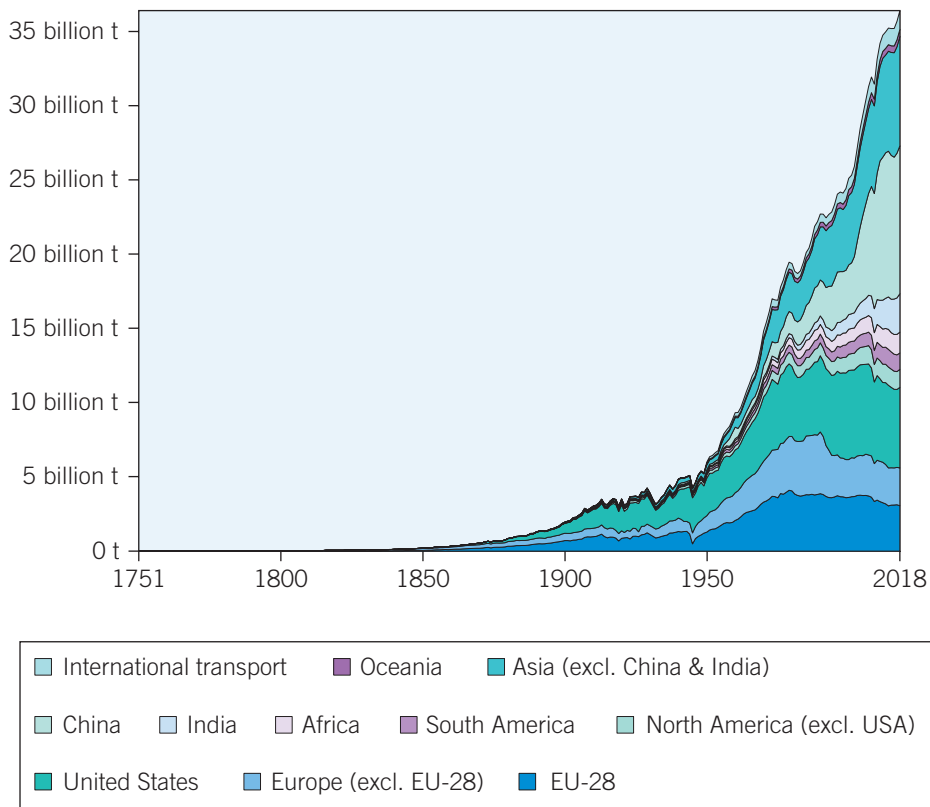
Global CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions remain highly concentrated today: top 10% emitters contribute to about 45% of global emissions, while bottom 50% emitters contribute to 13% of global emissions. Top 10% emitters live on all continents, with one third of them from emerging countries.

**Chancel and Piketty (2015: 2)**

middle-income countries such as China, India, and Brazil. Developing countries therefore have much to lose from global warming, but also potentially from addressing global warming via carbon emission reductions.

So, what are we to do, faced with these predicaments? Climate scientists are keen to point out that these global challenges require long-term global responses. Not only

**FIGURE 11.3** Annual total carbon dioxide emissions, by world region, 1751–2018



Note: This figure has been made by the Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center (CDIAC); Global Carbon Project (GCP). Published online at OurWorldInData.org (CC BY 4.0). Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-and-other-greenhouse-gas-emissions>. The figure measures CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from fossil fuels and cement production only—land use change is not included.



**BOX 11.5 Key Quotes: Troubles ahead**

The struggle for food and water will lead to economic migration on a biblical scale, dwarfing anything seen today, bringing instability and conflict to many parts of the world.

**(McGuire 2005: 38)**

This is not the end of the world as envisaged by many environmentalists in the late 1980s but it does mean a huge increase in misery for billions of people.

**(Maslin 2014: xvii)**

does climate change ‘challenge the concept of the nation-state versus global responsibility, but the short-term vision of our political leaders’ (Maslin 2014: xix). One of the fix points or baselines is the ‘magic number’ of limiting temperature rises to 2 °C above pre-industrial average temperatures. This number was established in February 2005 at an international science meeting in Exeter, United Kingdom, summoned by then British Prime Minister Tony Blair. It was based on scientific findings that below this threshold, there will be a mix of positive and negative consequences, whereas above this threshold, consequences of climate change will be overwhelmingly negative (Maslin 2014: 69). This consensus has subsequently been criticized for underestimating the negative effects of global warming, especially in the Global South, and today many scientists propose that the more relevant threshold or ceiling is a 1.5 °C increase above pre-industrial averages (McLaren and Markusson 2020: 4).

So far, global temperatures have risen approximately 1 °C since the Industrial Revolution, and by current projections they will have increased between 2.8 and 5.6 °C above pre-industrial average temperatures by 2100, unless dramatic reductions in GHG emissions are undertaken (Maslin 2014: 11–12). There is widespread agreement that an effective response that even comes close to keeping temperature rises close to the 2 °C (not to speak of the 1.5 °C) mark will require ‘binding, international agreements to cut GHG emissions’ (Maslin 2014: 133). These agreements must include both developed and developing countries because the former are such big emitters and because emissions in the latter have been increasing so quickly in recent decades (see Figure 11.3). Most important is to commit both the US and China, the two largest emitters.

However, not only do we need an international political solution where all big emitters pledge to cut GHG emissions, the developed countries must sacrifice additional wealth, which can be used to compensate developing countries for making large-scale cuts in future emissions. The current strategy for obtaining this kind of international cooperation has been termed ‘common but differentiated responsibility’, meaning that the Industrial North is to reduce their emissions the most and also contribute to financing climate mitigation and adaptation in the Global South (UNFCCC 2020). The total resources required for this kind of transformation are enormous: ‘To tackle climate change we really need the level of funding that is usually only ever achieved when a country is at war’ (Maslin 2014: 178). However, there is a potential bargain to be made

if the reaction comes sooner rather than later. In 2007, it was estimated that the cost of adapting now would amount to 1–3 per cent of global GDP whereas it could cost 20 per cent if we postpone the reaction into the future (Maslin 2014: 114).

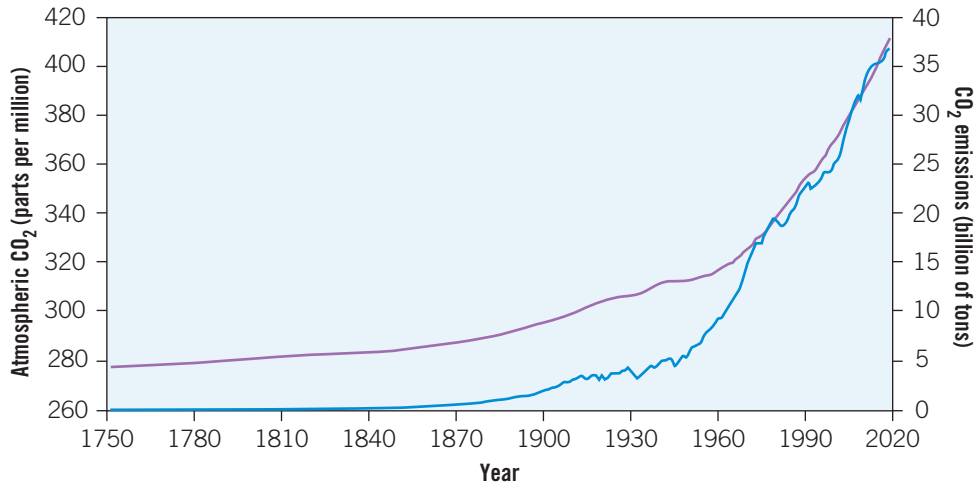
### 11.2.2 International Cooperation on Climate Change

To what extent is this kind of international response emerging? Are world leaders trying to secure the windfall of an early response, instead of waiting for the bill to grow dramatically?

To answer these questions, we first need to say something about international cooperation on environmental issues more generally. This kind of cooperation has in fact achieved some remarkable successes. The first was arguably the regulation and later ban on whale hunting. The International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling was established in Washington in 1946, and in 1982 an international ban on whaling (entering into effect in 1986) was agreed upon. This international cooperation has effectively reversed a development that had come within a hair's breadth of making several big species of whales extinct.

When talking about climate change, the biggest success is clearly the international agreement to deal with the depletion of the ozone layer (Maslin 2014: 19). In 1985, British scientists presented conclusive evidence of an ozone 'hole' over Antarctica, which could be linked to the emissions of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), used for instance in the production of refrigerators. Swift international action followed, bringing together democracies and autocracies and developed and developing countries in a common front against ozone depletion. That very same year, the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer was established, followed in 1987 by the landmark Montreal Protocol, which induced a shift to alternatives to CFCs. By the mid-1990s, huge decreases in emission had begun, and by 2030, CFCs will be completely phased out from industrial production. These international agreements have been so effective that the ozone depletion has been reversed, with the predicted date of full ozone layer recovery currently set to 2050 (Heywood 2014: 406). International agreements have been set up in a number of specific areas to address other environmental issues, including acid rain, toxic waste trade, the Antarctic environment, and biodiversity loss (Deere-Birkbeck 2009; Chasek et al. 2010).

There have also been a series of high-profile international initiatives to respond to global warming. Here, the landmark agreement was the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, under which most developed countries pledged to cut their emissions of carbon dioxide by an average of 5 per cent against 1990 levels in the period 2008–12. The Kyoto Protocol was an internationally binding agreement, which entered into force on February 16, 2005, with 37 countries committing to binding emissions targets. It also included provisions for carbon emission trading between countries, which introduced some flexibility into how countries would reach their targets. However, there were several problems with the Kyoto Protocol. First, the agreed measures were clearly inadequate to reverse or even significantly slow down global warming. Second, the world's then biggest emitter, the US, did not ratify the Protocol, and developing countries never signed it. Later rounds of climate negotiations—including conferences in Copenhagen (2009), Durban (2011), Doha (2012),

**FIGURE 11.4** Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and human CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, 1750–2019

Note: Figure taken from NOAA, ETHZ, Our World in Data and Global Carbon Project (GCP). Published online at NOAA Climate.gov. Available at: <https://climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide>.

Warsaw (2013), Lima (2014), Paris (2015), Marrakech (2016), Bonn (2017), Katowice (2018), and Madrid (2019)—have attempted to address these problems.

There has been some progress. The Paris Agreement signed in 2016 commits developing and developed countries to the same extent, while still recognizing common but differentiated responsibility in a number of ways. Among large emitters, only Turkey and Iran have failed to sign the Paris Agreement, the aim of which is to keep global temperature rises below the magic number of 2 °C above pre-industrial levels (or preferably even below 1.5 °C). However, the Paris Agreement does not force countries to set specific reduction targets for specific dates, and it was only accepted via executive order by former American president Barack Obama, and hence not ratified in the US Congress; this allowed Donald Trump to remove the US from the Agreement before President Joe Biden accepted it again. Overall, results have also been disappointing, as global emissions of carbon dioxide have increased at alarming rates ever since 1997 (see Figure 11.4).

### 11.2.3 What Does International Relations Theory Say?

Why would political leaders refrain from paying a smaller bill today, knowing that the future bill will increase by an order of magnitude? Why the international inertia when the scientific evidence of human-made global warming is irrefutable, and considering that the consequences are likely to be devastating, especially in some of the world's great conflict zones in the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia?

Let us look at this issue in light of what we know about international relations. As explained above, we mainly address international attempts to mitigate climate change, given the solid evidence of human-induced global warming. We can start by describing

the challenge in theoretical terms. American biologist Garrett Hardin's (1968) notion of the '**Tragedy of the Commons**' is helpful here. Hardin's metaphor concerns the commons of pre-modern rural villages, where village farmers had the right to grass their livestock. The tragedy consists in overgrazing, which comes about because each farmer has a self-interest in putting as many cows or sheep on the commons as possible, thereby exceeding its carrying capacity (i.e., the limits to what the global environment can support if insurmountable degradation is to be avoided), knowing that the community bears the loss. Likewise, each country in the world has an interest in emitting more carbon dioxide to stimulate national economic development, with the entire humanity bearing the costs of depletion of the commons, in this case in the form of global warming and its consequences. We can also return to some of the concepts broached in Chapter 4 and Chapter 10. A clean environment—or temperature rises kept below 1.5/2 °C above pre-industrial average temperatures—is a public good from which everyone benefits. The problem is that this public good is costly and that each actor (state) has an interest in attempting to free-ride. The negative externalities of industrial production thus call for a concerted international answer.

This brings us to the second problem, which we have also described in detail throughout this book, namely the challenge of cooperation under anarchy. In the absence of a world government or effective global institutions of governance, international cooperation can only come about via voluntary means: by some states agreeing to bear the brunt of the costs or by making a majority of states stop free-riding. It is necessary to set up and enforce the kind of international regimes that we described in detail in Chapter 4 and Chapter 10.

A third problem is that the interests of the relevant parties do not necessarily align. International solutions are made more difficult not just by free-riding, but also because certain groups and certain states are more vulnerable to the problems created by global warming than others—and because some groups or states stand to lose more than others by effective attempts to cut carbon emissions. While some developing countries, including vulnerable island states, press for immediate attention to global warming, other developing countries are not necessarily interested in prioritizing environmental matters at the expense of economic development goals (see Box 11.6). Turning to the developed countries, it makes a big difference whether we are talking about net oil producers—which are in some cases completely dependent on selling fossil fuels (e.g.,

#### BOX 11.6 Key Quotes: The global traction of the consumer dream

[M]any nations aspire to have the same lifestyle and thus carbon footprint as Western countries. The world's population is currently just under seven billion and it is likely to rise and plateau at nine billion by 2050. This adds up to eight billion people who would like the same lifestyle as a person living in the developed world, which would mean a huge potential increase in GHG emissions in this century to fuel this consumer dream.

**Maslin (2014: 164)**

Saudi Arabia) or politically affected by fossil industry interests (e.g., the US)—or net oil and gas importers (many Western European countries and Japan). Likewise, it makes a difference whether the countries have vibrant ‘green energy’ industries (e.g., wind, sun, or water power) or not. These diverging interests make concerted action more difficult.

Finally, there is a fourth problem, which has to do with the time horizons of political leaders and citizens. It is widely agreed that political leaders in both democracies and authoritarian states normally have a short-term focus on their own political survival (Downs 1957; Svobik 2012). Democratic leaders in developed countries therefore often shy away from inflicting costs on their citizens in order to solve a problem the consequences of which will only really manifest on someone else’s watch. Individuals also seem to prefer enjoyment of goods today to enjoyment of goods in the future. Economists build this into their models by assuming discount rates according to which a cost incurred to alleviate global warming today is bigger than a similar cost incurred in the future. There is a big debate about whether such discount rates are to be considered descriptive or prescriptive, but even natural scientists recognize the problem of short-termism. As Maslin (2014: 139) ruefully notes, ‘most people live for the present . . . As a global society we still have a very short-term view, usually measured in a few years between successive governments’.

Taken together, these challenges help us understand why it has been so difficult to achieve binding international cooperation about emission targets, even in a situation where the scientific evidence of global warming is irrefutable, where there is mounting evidence that the likely consequences of warming are dire, and where there is wide agreement that effective responses today will be much cheaper than effective responses at some point in the future. In several cases, this has led to lofty international declarations about the environment in theory and little concrete action in practice.

This sounds depressing, but we should not forget that recent decades have in fact seen repeated attempts at international cooperation on global warming, and that some progress has been made in terms of binding agreements. Moreover, there are several instances where environmental problems have encouraged robust international cooperation. As mentioned above, the stellar example is the international ozone regime. Several other regimes, by contrast, have been less effective because of the lack of sufficient commitment and tangible cooperation from participating countries (UNEP 2006; Grieco, Ikenberry, and Mastanduno 2015: 413–14). But perhaps what we are witnessing is solely a delayed response? Could the Kyoto Protocol or the Paris Agreement be a harbinger of a future resolve to deal more robustly with carbon dioxide emissions?

We can start by noting that leaders around the world are belatedly recognizing the dire consequences of global warming. While former US President Donald Trump might be a sceptic, his predecessor Barack Obama and his successor Joe Biden are not. EU leaders have committed themselves to emission cuts that are higher than those envisaged by the Kyoto Protocol, and the case of the EU-28 shows that it is possible to make large cuts in emission in industrial economies (see Figure 11.3). In other big emitters, such as Australia and Canada, the problems of global warming are clearly dawning on politicians and the public. Even authoritarian leaders in Russia and China are beginning to take global warming more seriously as some of the consequences manifest

**BOX 11.7** Key Developments: Climate and intrastate conflicts

Some scholars say that the typical violent conflict stemming from environment problems is not interstate but intrastate—i.e., within countries. A research project led by Thomas Homer-Dixon argues that environmental scarcity involves persistent, low-intensity conflict that may not lead to dramatic confrontations but can wear down governments (Homer-Dixon 1995: 178; 1999). For example, it can cause urban migration and unrest, decreased economic productivity, ethnic conflicts, and so on. Homer-Dixon argues, in a more speculative vein, that ‘countries experiencing chronic internal conflict because of environmental stress will probably either fragment or become more authoritarian . . . Authoritarian regimes may be inclined to launch attacks against other countries to divert popular attention from internal stresses’ (1995: 179). The Norwegian Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) has launched a number of ambitious research projects on conflicts that future processes of climate change are likely to cause (see <https://blogs.prio.org/ClimateAndConflict/>).

themselves. There is increased recognition that environmental degradation—much of it linked to global warming—is threatening political stability in many regions of the world, and that these problems are likely to spill over to the rest of the world, including developed countries and fast developers like China (see Box 11.7).

Environmental problems thus put pressure on states to engage in greater international cooperation. Indeed, environmental degradation can be said to make up a special kind of ‘threat’, not to states but to humanity itself. It is a threat to the ‘global commons’—i.e., the oceans, the seas, the ozone layer, and the climate system, which are a life support system for humankind as a whole (UNDP 2007).

To sum up, climate change can involve international conflict over scarce resources, as well as international cooperation to preserve the global commons, such as the ozone regime. It is difficult to specifically predict whether collaboration or discord will prevail because that depends on a number of different, unforeseen circumstances. What theories of IR enable us to do is, at best, to outline possible scenarios. Different IR theories thus make different predictions about the *general* prospect of binding international cooperation. By interrogating these theories—and relating them to each other—we can learn a lot about the obstacles to the kind of solutions presently favoured by the climate science community.

To do so one cannot simply focus on the international level. As mentioned above, there are specific groups who stand to lose from effective mitigation, and there are others who stand to gain from it. To understand global climate politics, domestic interests must be factored in. Some critics object that the environment cuts across the dividing line between domestic politics and international politics in ways not taken sufficiently into account by the traditional approaches’ focus on international relations. IR environmentalist scholars often argue that it is necessary to get beyond the traditional focus on states, because so many other actors are important when it comes to the environment:

e.g., transnational corporations, NGOs, consumers, and so on. Yet it is possible to argue, in reply, that liberals and IPE theorists are used to dealing with domestic conflict and with many different types of actors (Tanner and Allouche 2011). As we have argued throughout this book, all major schools of international relations in fact have something to say about the interactions between international and domestic factors.

For realists, the environment is one more explainable source of conflict between states which can be added to an already long list. This is most pronounced in the realist ‘geopolitics’ perspective, which, as the name implies, factors in natural resources in its view of interstate conflicts. While this used to include control of the seas or of Eastern Europe, much focus today is placed on the control of scarce natural resources, including oil and water in the Middle East. Perhaps because of this focus on natural resources, classical realists at an early point expressed concern about environmental damage and pointed out that it did not respect national borders (see Box 11.8). However, by natural inclination, realists are sceptical about the possibilities of addressing climate change via international cooperation. It is not that they believe that cooperation between states is impossible. But they are adamant that any cooperation will have to happen in the shadow of international anarchy. International agreements are no stronger than the parties’ interest in upholding them, possibly backed by great powers’ resolve to police these agreements (Purdon 2014). Seen from this vantage point, we are captives of an international system which makes cooperation difficult, meaning that the tragedy of the commons cannot be effectively dealt with.

For liberals and liberal IPE scholarship, climate change adds one more issue, albeit a very important one, to the agenda of international cooperation and regime formation. IPE scholars analyse how particular domestic sectors (say, the oil or ‘green energy’ industry) pressure political leaders to pursue certain policies in international negotiations about environmental issues, and how these international negotiations result in concerted action (Cohen 2019: 20). Liberals insist that we can free ourselves from the shackles of the Prisoner’s Dilemma for two reasons discussed in Chapter 4. First, international cooperation is not a one-shot game between isolated actors; it is an iterated game where cooperation becomes easier over time (Axelrod and Hamilton 1981). Second, institutions and regimes play a vital role in mitigating free-rider problems and

#### BOX 11.8 Key Quotes: George Kennan on the global nature of pollution

Polluted air does not hang forever over the country in which the pollution occurs. The contamination of coastal waters does not long remain solely the problem of the nation in whose waters it has its origin. Wildlife—fish, fowl and animal—is no respecter of national boundaries, either in its movements or in the sources from which it draws its being. Indeed, the entire ecology of the planet is not arranged in national compartments; and whoever interferes seriously with it anywhere is doing something that is almost invariably of serious concern to the international community at large.

**George Kennan (1970: 401–2)**



devising solutions to negative externalities (see Chapters 4 and 10). Liberals are therefore much more optimistic than realists with respect to binding international initiatives to address e.g. global warming.

Some constructivists have gone one step further by arguing that international institutions can even change the preferences of actors, further increasing the potential of international cooperation (Haas 2000). The scientific community might also play a critical role in fostering norm change, as the IPCC has arguably done (Paterson 2013: 271–2). That is, climate experts and social movements have pushed a new common understanding of the necessity of effectively responding to climate change that is likely to influence how political leaders and citizens see the world—and how they respond to the challenge of global warming. This leaves even more room for changes in state behaviour, which might pave the way for efficient international cooperation on climate change.

Similar arguments can be found in some more recent attempts to take an International Society perspective (Chapter 5) on climate change. The global environment is here construed not just as an exogenous ‘issue’ for IR but as something which is becoming part of the international society itself. For instance, Buzan and Falkner (2019) argue that environmental stewardship is emerging as a primary institution of international society which is likely to have staying power, and which is reflected in a number of ‘secondary institutions’ such as environmental regimes and intergovernmental institutions. It has also been argued that the UN climate regime has made China accept that addressing climate change is an inherent part of the responsibility that accrues from great power status (Knudsen and Navari 2019).

Turning to post-positivist approaches, some believe that the global human society is moving dangerously close to the limits of the planet’s carrying capacity; they also think that there are no simple technological fixes that can take care of the problem. There can be no infinite growth on a planet with finite resources. Therefore, many radical voices call for moving beyond states as the central actors in international relations and beyond the value systems that underpin traditional IR theories (Paterson 2013). The most spectacular manifestation at present is probably a new body of scholarship termed ‘green theory’, which can be situated more broadly in critical theory (Goodin 2013). Green theory pushes us to free ourselves of the straitjacket of competitive interstate relations by widening the political community within which we seek solutions to environmental problems, and it challenges the way we currently value economic consumption over environmental concerns. In a seminal contribution, Goodin (2013) thus introduces a ‘green theory of value’, based on putting nature and long-term ecological interests before people and short-term human interests.

Traditional IR theories, the argument goes, may well have shed light on some of the obstacles to dealing with climate change, but they have also proven hopelessly tied to a state-centric world-view that is in itself the main impediment to effective responses. The aim of green theory is to devise an alternative framework to current IR theories. For instance, green theorists criticize liberals for solely attempting to formulate solutions to environmental problems within the already existing global institutions and international regimes. Further, liberals put private interests above common ecological concerns,



including the interests of future generations who will inherit an ecologically impoverished world if current developments continue (Dyer 2018). To adequately address climate change, nothing short of a revolution in our thinking is called for: one which places the environment at the top of the political agenda and leaves behind the old structures of international relations, or existing economic, political, and social structures more generally (Paterson 2013). We need to transcend IR scholarship's traditional preoccupation with states—to redefine IR or at least our understanding of international relations—and listen to the social movements which urge global solutions, based on a value shift that favours ecological concerns. Rather than more of the same—in the form of conservative 'problem-solving' knowledge—the current predicament calls for critical, 'emancipatory' knowledge (for the distinction, see Chapter 8).

Likewise, scholars employing world system or dependency perspectives have emphasized the way unequal exchange has contributed to aggravating global warming in the first place, and made effective global responses much more difficult because they have to be formulated within the context of global injustice. Seen from this vantage point, climate change, or more particularly the fact that emissions are mainly produced by the Industrial North but the costs in terms of environmental degradation and catastrophes are mainly borne by the Global South, can be seen as yet another aspect of the fundamentally unequal exchange of the present international economic system. A book with the telling title *A Climate of Injustice* (Roberts and Parks 2007) identifies two ways in which global inequality creates non-cooperative behaviour between the Global South and the Global North:

The first involves poverty and powerlessness which directly deprive developing countries of the technical, financial, and administrative capacity to effectively negotiate with the North and meaningfully address their own greenhouse gas emissions. The second path . . . evolves around the historical experience of poorer nations, which has produced and reinforced a worldview at odds with that of richer nations, generating widespread mistrust, risk aversion, and divergent expectations about how to address climate change.

**(Balsiger 2008: 409)**

According to this perspective, it is not the Prisoner's Dilemma that is the major obstacle, but much deeper structural inequalities built into the present international system.

In short, IR theories take us a long way in understanding international responses to climate change, even if they differ with respect to the room they see for effective solutions (O'Neil 2009). What, based on these theories, can we say about our ability to deal with climate change internationally? Is there room for optimism after all? On the one hand, it should by now be clear that scholars solely stressing the Prisoner's Dilemma or unequal relations of exchange underestimate the potential for international cooperation with respect to climate change. We have seen cooperation since the 1980s, it has been remarkably efficient with respect to the problem of ozone layer depletion, and everything indicates that political actors—urged on by social movements and scientific communities—around the world are taking the problem of global warming more and more seriously, facilitating ambitious international responses to it.

On the other hand, it also seems clear that responses are not only delayed, they also repeatedly fall short of what is needed to actually address the problem of global

warming. As Paterson (2013: 271–2) points out, the period since the 1980s has paradoxically seen both a huge increase in international agreements and regimes to address environmental issues *and* a huge increase in pollution and GHG emissions. In other words, while international agreements and international institutions are probably making a difference—and sometimes a significant difference, as in the case of ozone layer depletion—this is at most delaying the general consequences of human-created climate change; it is in no way reversing it.

It is exactly at this point that scholars have called for IR analysis of the deeper ways in which international dynamics have produced and are reproducing global warming. We have only scratched the surface of this fascinating debate. Indeed, proponents of green theory will probably object that our analysis in this chapter is a good example of how traditional scholarship is captive of a state-centric view of IR. Green theory (and some natural scientists) support a new kind of global environmental governance undertaken by local communities but cutting out the states. Traditional IR theories consider this an unlikely development; they are also sceptical about the basic transformation of unequal exchange relations that dependency scholars call for. Seen from this ‘traditionalist’ or conservative vantage point, realists would appear to be correct in one key respect, namely that any global agreement will have to be chiselled out in the context of states with different interests and power. This takes us back to the tragedy of the commons, free-rider problems, negative externalities, and the difficulty of cooperation under anarchy. If this analysis is correct, we are in for a hot future.

## 11.3 International Terrorism

Terrorism is the unlawful use or threatened use of violence against civilians, often to achieve political, religious, or similar objectives. International terrorism involves the territory or the citizens of more than one country. Terrorism is nothing new; it has probably existed ever since human societies began to regulate the use of violence. The reason it has recently risen to prominence is two-fold. First, the decrease in interstate warfare since the end of the Cold War (Pettersson and Eck 2018). Second, the unusual scale and intensity of some of the terrorist attacks that have occurred in the new millennium, including the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, later attacks in Paris, Madrid, London, and in other parts of the world. This violence in the midst of an otherwise relatively peaceful international system has put the issue of international terrorism high on the agenda. It is an issue that concerns IR for obvious reasons; IR is not least about national and international security. When the only superpower in the international system, the United States, defined international terrorism as the first-rank threat to US security (National Security Strategy (NSS) 2002) and went on to launch a ‘war on terror’, the issue must rank high on the political and scholarly agenda.

### 11.3.1 Terrorism: Past and Present

The precise definition of terrorism raises several problems (see Box 11.9); when two scholars asked a hundred individuals working in the field to define terrorism, the

### BOX 11.9 Key Concepts: UN Security Council definition of terrorism (2004)

Criminal acts, including those against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public . . . intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international protocols relating to terrorism, are under no circumstances justifiable by considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar nature.

**Quoted from Weinberg and Eubank (2008: 186)**

questionnaires yielded 109 definitions (Weinberg and Eubank 2008: 186; see also Hansen 2021). One controversy concerns the relationship between terrorism and other forms of political violence. Some think that there are legitimate forms of political violence which are thus not terrorism. For example, one of the leaders of the Palestinian Fatah movement declared in 1973 that he was ‘firmly opposed . . . to terrorism’; but he went on to add that ‘I do not confuse revolutionary violence with terrorism, or operations that constitute political acts with others that do not’ (Iyad 1983: 146).

Another controversy concerns the inclusion or not of state-sponsored terrorism in the definition. It is clear that states (for example, Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union) have sponsored terrorism in a number of cases (Sluka 2000; Menjivar and Rodriguez 2005). At the same time, the mass-murder terrorist attacks of recent years appear not to be directly supported by states, but that is of course not a strong argument for excluding states from the definition altogether. A final controversy concerns the term ‘civilians’. Some find the term misleading because attacks on military personnel who are not on active duty should also be considered terrorism. For that reason, some prefer to use the term ‘non-combatants’ instead of ‘civilians’.

Most terrorism is national; it is related to political struggles, most often in weak states where democratic politics is fragile or absent and incumbent leaders are considered illegitimate, such as in Colombia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, or Indonesia. In the weakest states, most of which are in sub-Saharan Africa, terrorism takes place in a context of more or less permanent civil war. However, more consolidated states have also had severe problems with terrorism, including Britain, France, India, Russia, Spain, Norway, and Argentina. Such terrorism is national because the enemy is national and often groups can fight as guerrillas, getting support from local sympathizers.

An upsurge in international terrorism, in the form of aircraft hijackings, took place from the late 1960s. Air travel had expanded significantly since the 1950s; there were no effective security systems in airports; and the international media—in particular, television—provided extensive coverage that appealed to groups eager to send their messages to the world. The hijacking of airliners increased from five incidents in 1966 to ninety-four in 1969 (Kiras 2005: 483). Improved security measures helped reduce

hijacking, but international terrorism did not disappear. During the 1980s, there was an increased incidence of radical Muslim groups attacking American targets in Lebanon, Iran, Somalia, and elsewhere.

Such attacks continued after the end of the Cold War. There used to be much terrorism in Europe carried out by separatist groups such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland and Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) in the Basque provinces of Spain and by Marxist-leaning groups in e.g., Germany and Italy. This has largely disappeared, though some observers worry that the 6 January 2021 attack on the US Congress is a harbinger of a revival of homegrown terrorism in Western democracies, possibly both by disgruntled right-wing and left-wing groups. International terrorism has become a phenomenon primarily connected with radical Muslim groups. The best known of these groups or networks is al-Qaeda (The Base) (Smith and Zeigler 2017).

International terrorism has revived the spectre of physical security threat to states and civil societies in the OECD world. With the end of the Cold War, there was hope that this event would signal the end of war and large-scale violence altogether in these countries. Colin Powell made the point in 1991: 'I'm running out of demons. I'm running out of enemies. I'm down to Castro and Kim Il Sung.' The al-Qaeda attacks put national security in the sense of ordinary people's safety back on the agenda. The attacks of 9/11 helped create a great expansion of terrorism studies; an overview from 2013 lists no less than one hundred journals relevant for terrorism research (Tinnes 2013). While it is true that most acts of terrorism take place in weak states in the Global South, there are also weak states in the North with serious terrorism problems, as demonstrated in the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the violent conflict in Ukraine. In order to address the second question in Box 11.1, we need to evaluate the extent and gravity of the terrorist threat. The question is controversial; some think the threat is of no great concern; others argue that it is highly significant. Those who argue the former view claim that, in general terms, the scale of terrorist operations makes them more like crime than like organized warfare. According to *The Atlantic*, former president of the United States Barack Obama has pointed out that more Americans die by falling asleep in their bathtubs than from terrorism on American soil. And just as crime has existed in most or all types of societies, terrorism 'has been around forever and will presumably continue to exist' (Mueller 2004: 199) without presenting existential threats to society.

At the same time, just as there can be organized crime, there can be organized terrorism. The al-Qaeda network is a case in point and the 11 September 2001 attacks were of unusual magnitude; during the entire twentieth century, 'fewer than twenty terrorist attacks managed to kill as many as 100 people, and none caused more than 400 deaths. Until [11 September], far fewer Americans were killed in any grouping of years by all forms of international terrorism than were killed by lightning' (Mueller 2004: 110).

From this view, it appears highly unlikely that terrorism as represented by al-Qaeda will grow into a large-scale threat to Western societies. While there are a great number of terrorist groups scattered around the world, especially in weak states, their ambitions remain national, not international; only very few move to become international terrorists. Second, al-Qaeda's kind of international terrorism is specifically connected to a radical, fundamentalist version of Islam which is not representative of Islam as

such. Finally, those who think the terrorist threat is not so serious emphasize how the al-Qaeda network is specifically connected to marginalized Muslim groups of *Mujahed-in* (fighters for Allah's cause) who joined together to fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and were able to use that country as a safe haven. These groups are not very large, and they no longer have easy access to countries where they can set up bases.

However, it can also be argued that the threat of international terrorism is very serious. First of all, open, complex societies are necessarily vulnerable: there are limited possibilities for surveillance and control; suicide terrorists carrying forceful, low-tech bombs cannot easily be stopped. The London bomb attacks of 2005 demonstrated that Muslims with a relatively 'normal' background as citizens of the UK had been recruited for the assaults. This could be taken to mean that the potential recruiting base for terrorist actions is very large indeed; it is not merely confined to ex-Afghani *Mujahedins*; it also comprises self-selected members of local Muslim societies in the UK and other Western countries. The conflict in Syria and Iraq has involved some substantial recruitment of Muslim militants from Western countries. Furthermore, some commentators argue that the US-Western involvement in the war in Iraq leads to 'blowback terrorism', meaning that the war tends to increase, rather than decrease, the recruitment potential to international terrorism (Mann 2003: 159–93). The same argument could be made about the Western involvement in the fight against the so-called Islamic State group (ISIL) in Iraq and Syria in 2016–17 (Chellaney 2017).

Finally, there is the danger of international terrorists gaining access to and using weapons of mass destruction (WMD); that is, chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. It is clear that terrorist groups have incentives to use WMD; they would be able to create massive destruction and fear, and that would possibly elevate the groups to a new power position vis-à-vis their adversaries and peers (Schmid 2005; Ward 2018). A 2004 study by Graham Allison argued that a nuclear attack by terrorists on America was more likely than not in the decade ahead (Allison 2004). If policymakers take immediate countermeasures, such an attack is 'preventable'. If they do not, says Allison, the attack is 'inevitable' (see Box 11.10). Meanwhile, other commentators consider it less likely that terrorists can gain access to and will use WMD (Pearlstein 2004); the barriers to entry

#### BOX 11.10 Key Arguments: Graham Allison on nuclear terrorism

First, thefts of weapons-usable material and attempts to steal nuclear weapons are not a hypothetical possibility, but a proven and recurring fact.

Second, . . . the only high hurdle to creating a nuclear bomb is access to fissionable material . . . as John Foster, a leading American bomb maker . . . wrote a quarter century ago, 'if the essential nuclear materials are at hand, it is possible to make an atomic bomb using information that is available in the open literature'.

Third, terrorists would not find it difficult to smuggle such a nuclear device into the United States. The nuclear material in question is smaller than a football.

**Allison (2004: 9–11)**

in terms of getting hold of materials and the competence required to use them remain significant.

What can we conclude about the terrorist threat? The question is not easy; no doubt people in Western metropolitan areas such as London, New York, or Madrid will be more worried about the threat than many others, and understandably so (Muggah 2019). On the one hand, the threat is not an overriding, existential menace to the states and civil societies of the world; on the other hand, the threat is real and must be taken seriously.

### 11.3.2 International Terrorism and IR

Let us turn to the third question in Box 11.1: the theoretical challenge posed by the issue of international terrorism. On first impression, existing theories of IR would appear to be well suited to deal with international terrorism. It is a security threat, and security problems are at the heart of the realist approach. Liberals identify terrorist groups as a set of non-state actors that substantially influence the international agenda. IPE theorists study the political economy of international terror (Muro 2019). In short, existing approaches would appear to be able to handle the issue very well.

However, a closer look reveals a different picture. Realism focuses on security threats *between states*. Non-state actors, such as international terrorist groups, often tend to be ignored by realists, because compared with states, they are considered insignificant. One outspoken realist, Colin Gray, simply says that transnational terrorism is ‘pretty small beer’ (see Box 11.11). Assessment of terrorist threats clearly depends on one’s perspective. Another well-known realist, John Mearsheimer, admitted that realism does not have ‘much to say about the causes of terrorism’ (Mearsheimer 2002); furthermore, terrorists are non-state actors and realists do not have much to say about them either. That said, Mearsheimer also maintained that because terrorism plays out in the state arena, realism and terrorism are ‘inextricably linked’ (Mearsheimer 2002; 2018).

According to one commentator, this realist view explains why the Bush administration was slow to react in spite of warnings before 11 September 2001. Condoleezza Rice and other top members of the George W. Bush administration were realists. Rice’s understanding of international relations was ‘state-centric’. ‘Her policy ends [were] filtered through national self-interests. Her privileged means [were] military. And her

#### BOX 11.11 Key Arguments: International terrorism: a realist view

[I]t seems improbable that transnational actors such as al-Qaeda will shape the (in) security environment for decades to come. Compared with the unpleasantness in Indo-Pakistani relations, the ambition of China to be sovereign throughout maritime east Asia, and the determination of Russia to regain positions of authority by the imperial marches lost in 1991, transnational terrorism is pretty small beer. Geopolitics, not transnationalisms (including ‘civilizations’), shapes the mainstream of historical events.

**Gray (2002: 231)**

self-understanding of world events was demarcated by a clear division between international and domestic realms' (Klarevas 2004: 21). Furthermore, when realists react to the terrorist threat, they have a tendency to *territorialize* it. That is, given their focus on interstate relations, realists are compelled to believe that international terrorist groups 'can flourish only with some significant measure of official state acquiescence, if not necessarily state sponsorship' (Gray 2002: 231).

In other words, realists tend to translate the terrorist threat into a threat from another state; and some of them tend to think that the response to such threat must be by way of military force. However, there is no necessary link between a realist view of the world and a commitment to the 'war on terror' (see also Chapter 3). John Mearsheimer argues that:

what the United States wants to do is not rely too heavily on military force—in part, because the target doesn't lend itself to military attack, but more importantly, because using military force in the Arab and Islamic world is just going to generate more resentment against us and cause the rise of more terrorists and give people cause to support these terrorists. So I'd privilege diplomacy much more than military force in this war, and I think the Bush administration would be wise if it moved more towards diplomacy and less towards force.

(Mearsheimer interview 2002: <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people2/Mearsheimer>)

Liberals, by contrast to realists, appreciate the importance of non-state actors. Therefore, they are more ready to accept that international terrorist groups claim priority on the international agenda. At the same time, liberals are more ready to emphasize the need for international cooperation in facing the terrorist threat. Joseph Nye says that 'the best response to transnational terrorist networks is networks of cooperating government agencies' (2003: 65). He may certainly be right; yet the remark also discloses a liberal leaning towards problem solving via cooperation.

#### **BOX 11.12** Key Arguments: Post-structuralist analysis: the discourse on terror

. . . terrorism is a social construction. The terrorist actor is a product of discourse, and hence discourse is the logical starting point for terrorism research . . . Hence [we] suggest a shift of perspective in terrorism studies—from an actor-centred to a discourse-centred perspective. [We] develop a discourse approach that emphasizes the crucial role of metaphors in the making of reality . . . Terrorism was first constituted as war, but from 2004 onwards the principal metaphor shifted from war to crime, constructing Al-Qaeda as a criminal rather than a military organization. This shift has transformed Al-Qaeda from an external to an internal threat, which has entailed a shift in counter-terrorism practices from a military to a judicial response.

**Hülse and Spencer (2008: 571)**



World systems analysis inspired by Immanuel Wallerstein (Chapter 6) has another take on international terrorism. The idea is that this kind of terrorism is connected to systemic factors, in particular to the rise and decline of leading states in the world system. The leading state, the United States, is currently under pressure and that opens it to more activity by terrorist actors: 'if terrorist activity is aided by breakdowns in the system's normative and political order structure, then some forms of terrorism may be more likely when the system is undergoing transition or the system leader is in a state of decline' (Lizardo 2008: 109). Globalization, involving closer integration among states and technological advances in communication and transportation, has also pushed the expansion of international terrorism.

Post-structuralist analysis has noted the different perceptions of terrorism in the realist and the liberal discourse on the subject. The claim is that an analysis of the discourse on terrorism is an important element in understanding the way Western societies approach the terrorist threat (see Box 11.12). For instance, 'securitization theory' emphasizes that terrorism is a prime example of how political actors 'securitize' issues to give them more political attention than they deserve if we simply look at fatality figures or the economic damage caused. This politization of terrorism, in turn, justifies disproportional measures such as increased surveillance or constraints on civil liberties (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998).

Scholars sceptical of the mainstream approaches to the analysis of terrorism call for the strengthening of 'critical terrorism studies' (Gunning 2007; Jackson 2007). They charge that mainstream analyses are too closely tied in with government agencies and that puts limitations on their work. Other scholars are not convinced (Weinberg and Eubank 2008). These debates indicate that terrorism studies are coming of age as a field in their own right with discussions between different approaches. This can be considered 'a perfectly normal process of evolution' (Weinberg and Eubank 2008: 188) of a new field of study.

In sum, several approaches can provide important insights in the analysis of international terrorism. Each perspective also tends to 'shape' the issue so it fits into the particular theoretical point of view. As IR analysts, we need to evaluate the relative merits of each approach. As indicated, this evaluation is only possible if we also assess the larger question of the character and magnitude of the terrorist threat.

## 11.4 Religion in IR: A Clash of Civilizations?

Many scholars argue that the events of 11 September 2001 signal a 'resurgence of religion' in international affairs. *God is Back*, a bestselling book announced in 2009 (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009). In other words, the claim is that there is an 'increasing importance of religious beliefs, practices, and discourses in personal and public life' (Thomas 2005: 26) and this has significant implications for international relations.

Religion and politics were deeply integrated in earlier days, as explained in Chapter 1. But the modern state that arose in Europe in the centuries after the Thirty Years War (1618–48) made religion a private matter, separate from politics. Political rulers, on their part, agreed not to interfere in matters of religion in other countries. The



expulsion of religion from politics in the context of the modern sovereign state came to be a model for other parts of the world. Westerners tend to think of modernization as simultaneously involving secularization; that is to say, when new areas of the world embarked on the Western path of modernization, they would more or less automatically also become secular and proceed to separate religion from politics (Bellin 2008: 317). According to sociologist José Casanova, the theory of secularization is so strong that it ‘may be the only theory which was able to attain a truly paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences’ (1994: 17).

It is this claim of secularization that is being increasingly called into question (Bellin 2008; Philpott 2009). Religion never completely left the stage, not even in the Western world; it influences the political agenda in many countries, most notably the United States. Only a few years after Casanova’s statement, another leading sociologist, Peter Berger, wrote that:

the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today, with some exceptions to which I will come presently, is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labelled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.

**Berger (1999: 17)**

#### 11.4.1 Huntington and the Clash of Civilizations

Perhaps the most influential and well-known analysis emphasizing the continued importance and, indeed, resurgence of religion in politics is the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis by Samuel Huntington (1993, 1996). His central contention is summarized in Box 11.13.

Huntington speaks of ‘civilizations’, but at the core of a civilization is religion: ‘To a very large degree, the major civilizations in human history have been closely identified with the world’s great religions’ (Huntington 1996: 42). Therefore, Huntington’s

##### **BOX 11.13** Key Quotes: The ‘clash of civilizations’

The fundamental source of conflict . . . will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future (Huntington 1993: 22).

The most important countries in the world come overwhelmingly from different civilizations. The local conflicts most likely to escalate into broader wars are those between groups and states from different civilizations . . . The key issues on the international agenda involve differences among civilizations (Huntington 1996: 29).

**Quoted from Huntington (1993, 1996)**

statement is a powerful assertion about the significant role of culture, meaning first and foremost religion, in international politics.

There are several ways of questioning Huntington's analysis. First, there is the idea of civilizations; is it possible to draw together a common religious-cultural pattern across a wide range of societies and thus identify them as 'civilizations'? Huntington is himself in doubt as to whether there is an African civilization, perhaps because there is not a religion shared by all Africans. Confucianism is seen to lie at the heart of the Sinic civilization and that is not a religion in the ordinary meaning of the term. So, one major objection to the analysis is that the complex pattern of religions, cultures, and civilizations is not spelled out with great clarity; and if it were, it would not be possible to summarize those patterns in terms of general civilizational identities. Identities are much more diverse and religion is not necessarily the primary core, be it in Europe or China. Paul Berman argues that cultural boundaries are not sufficiently distinct to permit the designation of civilizations; he therefore rejects that there is an 'Islamic Civilization' or a 'Western Civilization' (Berger 2003).

Furthermore, Huntington identifies these civilizational qualities at the macro-level across larger periods of time. But in order to do that, it is necessary to ascribe primordial qualities to religious-cultural identifications. That is to say, what it means to be 'Islamic', 'Orthodox', or 'Hindu' is highly consistent over time; empires may 'rise and fall, governments come and go, civilizations remain' (Huntington 1996: 43). Such a statement of consistency over time does not fit the historical pattern; the exact qualities connected with religious-cultural labels are dynamic and not static. All world religions have historically been remarkably flexible, even with respect to their most important doctrines. As the English sociologist John A. Hall (1985: 20) puts it, 'these belief-systems are loose and baggy monsters, full of saving clauses and alternatives that can be brought out by an interested group when occasion demands'. They have developed and changed dramatically over time; religious-cultural identities are always contested. What it means to be 'Islamic' or 'Hindu' or even 'Western' today is not the same as it was several decades ago and there continues to be intense debate within civilizations about basic values (see Box 11.14). In order to set civilizations in opposition to each other, they have to be attributed certain consistent qualities and that is not possible because there is too much diversity and dynamic change *within* civilizations.

These objections question the claim made by Huntington, that 'conflict between groups in different civilizations will be more frequent, more sustained and more violent than conflicts between groups in the same civilization' (Huntington 1993: 48). A systematic empirical analysis of militarized interstate disputes between 1950 and 1992 indicates that:

pairs of states split across civilizational boundaries are no more likely to become engaged in disputes than are other states *ceteris paribus* . . . Contrary to the thesis that the clash of civilizations will replace the Cold War rivalries as the greatest source of conflict, militarized interstate disputes across civilizational borders became less common, not more so, as the Cold War waned.

**Russett et al. (2000: 583)**

**BOX 11.14 Key Arguments: The 'West' against 'Islam'? Not exactly**

'Western' values are described as individualist, 'Asian' and 'Islamic' ones as collectivist. The Universal Human Rights Declarations and Covenants are . . . considered to be the paragon of an individualist [Western] culture . . . Here it is worthwhile reminding of several precursors of this debate. Before 1933 in Germany, 'Western *civilizational* values' that were regarded as 'superficial' had been contrasted with substantially different, profound *cultural* 'German values' . . . there was a similar discussion in Czarist Russia whose spokesmen could count on Germany's intellectual support.

The . . . assumption in declarations of fundamental rights that all men are born free and equal in dignity and rights was considered in the old Europe . . . a strangely deviant and absurd idea.

Advocates of Asian and Islamic values emphasize the rootedness of such values in centuries-old cultural traditions. But neither at the official nor at the unofficial level do Asians all along stand up for 'Asian' values. Not even in East and Southeast Asia where this debate started from do they agree . . . As far as 'Islamic' values are concerned, it is striking that they are maintained in the Arab–Iranian region especially. Here, prominent fundamentalist authors are at home . . . In contrast, a debate on reform-oriented Islam takes place mainly in Southeast Asia. This different emphasis in the discourses on Islam reflects the chronic crisis of development in North Africa and the Middle East on the one hand, and the relatively . . . successful development of Southeast Asia on the other.

**Quoted from Senghaas (2007: 199; 2008: 8–9)**

Even if the 'clash of civilizations' can be called off as the defining feature of post-Cold War world order, there may be other valid insights in the analysis. Huntington would appear to be right in claiming that 'in the coming decades, questions of identity, meaning cultural heritage, language and religion, will play a central role in politics' (Huntington 2007). Ethno-religious identities are often significant elements in violent conflict. However, this is of course a much broader set of issues than the 'clash' which is focused narrowly on certain conflicts seen to involve civilizations. Indeed, many conflicts of identity pit religious and ethnic groups within Huntington's broader civilizations against each other, for instance, Sunni and Shia Muslims in the Middle East and Catholics and Protestants in Europe. This broader religion and identity issue was also raised by Benjamin Barber; he used the label of 'jihad', but extended it to include all kinds of ethnic, religious, or tribal conflict (Barber 1995). Box 11.15 presents a summary of the ways in which religion influences politics.

### 11.4.2 IR Theory and Religion

A decade ago, the field of IR saw an ambitious attempt to bring religion back in (Bellin 2008; Philpott 2009). The message was twofold. First, there is by now a substantial scholarship which studies 'such questions as the role of religion as a source of violent conflict

**BOX 11.15** Key Arguments: A rise in the influence of religion on politics

First, religious organizations are growing in their power to shape public debate and the policies of governments. The Hindu nationalist parties in India, Muslim movements in Turkey, Orthodox Christians in Russia, conservative Christians in America, ultra-Orthodox Jews and Orthodox Jewish nationalists in Israel, and evangelicals in Latin America have all come to exercise increasing influence over laws governing marriage, education, foreign policy toward favored groups and states, religious minorities, and the relationship between religion and the institutions of the state. Second, religious organizations exercise a transnational influence upon the politics of outside states . . . Jews in America provide strong direct support to Israel. Worldwide Islamic organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood provide social services in many nations, building loyal followings who then articulate Islamic politics, sometimes through violence. Third, even more powerfully, religion shapes not only the policies of states but also their very constitutions, thus becoming ‘the law of the land’. This is most dramatic in the Muslim world, where, in an ‘Islamic resurgence’ over the past couple of decades, *sharia* has become public law in Iran, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Malaysia, and twelve of Nigeria’s thirty-six states . . . Most radical of all, religiously motivated groups are questioning the very legitimacy of the international order, the Westphalian synthesis, in all of its strands. The most influential of these are networks of Muslims who act on behalf of the unity of the *umma*, the people of Islam. Like al-Qaeda.

**Quoted from Philpott (2002: 86)**

**BOX 11.16** Key Theories: Classical realism and religion

In short, Morgenthau’s and Niebuhr’s broad interpretations of power and interest . . . [are] good news for scholars who are interested in using cultural variables in the framework of realism . . . Morgenthau’s understanding of politics as captured in classical realism is a ‘moral and political’ project in addition to an analytic device. Niebuhr’s linkage of human nature to state of conflict via will-to-power and the tendency of society to ignore moral considerations also allows classical realist investigations of behavior as well as issues of interpretation of the divine. Therefore, religion can be easily integrated into this strand of realism both as an independent and as an intervening variable.

**Quoted from Sandal and James (2011: 11–12)**

and war, the role of religion and religious institutions in conflict resolution, and the role of religion as a source of international norms’ (Bellin 2008: 339). Second, and nonetheless, religion remains ‘*undertheorized*’ in IR (Bellin 2008: 339; see also Philpott 2009: 185–7).

If issues of religion, together with broader identity issues, play a more important role in international relations, is the discipline theoretically equipped to handle the

challenge? Some think not: According to Philpott (2009: 187), the main problem is that ‘theories of global politics are secular’, and have been so for a hundred years. Vendulka Kubáľková proposes the foundation of a new paradigm, called International Political Theology (IPT); the aim of which is to analytically confront the resurgence of religion in IR (Kubáľková 2013: 79–107). Others find that this is going much too far. The major theories in IR may not have focused specifically on religion, but that does not necessarily mean they have nothing to say about it.

Realism, for example, does not deny a role for religious beliefs or other ideological convictions in international affairs; classical realism focuses on human nature and the ways in which interests are defined. It is clear that religion can play an important role in this context, be it in Iran, India, or the United States. A classical realist such as Morgenthau (Chapter 3) emphasizes that politics is governed by laws which are rooted in human nature. Human nature provides an entry to the inclusion of religion in the analysis of international politics. That is because religious convictions are part of human nature and thus influence the actors that pursue power and interest on behalf of states, sometimes in decisive ways. Morgenthau himself was a deeply religious person, and the renewed interest in religion in international affairs has sparked another round of reflection on the writings of Morgenthau and other classical realists in order to reassess their views on the role of religion (Sandal and James 2011) (see Box 11.16).

As regards neorealism, the accommodation of religion is less easy. Neorealists would argue that in an anarchical world security concerns come first: ‘states have a hierarchy of interests: security at the top, but then economic welfare, ideological and humanitarian concerns in descending order’ (Desch 1998: 160). In other words, when survival is at stake, religious convictions cannot be the top concern. One reason IR scholars have neglected religion until recently was precisely that the Cold War privileged matters of state survival and interstate rivalry, and therefore secured a realist dominance in IR (Bellin 2008: 318).

Yet, in many situations, survival is not at stake, and that leaves more room for religious matters (Barnett 1996; Bellin 2008). In other words, religious issues can enter the equation, even in a neorealist analysis, in situations where the anarchic pressure does not put survival at the top of the agenda.

Religion is, of course, virulent in many other contexts. For example, is Iran primarily a conventional regional power or is it a promoter of Islamic faith? Are Indian Hindu nationalists trying to increase the power of India in the world or are they primarily guardians of Hindi convictions? In most cases, realists would stress the pursuit of power over the pursuit of religious principles. Yet, even here it is the case that rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, for example, is connected to a larger Sunni–Shia rivalry in the Middle East (Sandal and James 2011).

Liberals and International Society theorists focus on international norms and institutions. They are well equipped to study the emergence and significance of religious norms and institutions in the international arena (Sandal and James 2011). The liberal focus on individuals and groups from civil society as important actors in international relations also widens to the study of religious groups. At the same time, liberal theorizing assumes that actors are rational, seeking to maximize their interests. That limits

the role of religion because it is considered an ‘idiosyncratic exercise which feeds on man’s irrational impulse with limited material implications for the conduct of global relations’ (Mgba and Ukpere 2013: 539). On this view, the influence of religious ideas on international norms is presently more indirect: ideas about international justice, humanitarian intervention, and justifications for going to war are indebted to theological debates about moral values and appropriate behaviour (Haynes 2006; Sandal and Fox 2013).

Constructivists are very well placed to study the role of religion in international affairs; according to one analysis, ‘bringing culture and religion back into international relations is part of a wider effort to bring ideas, values, more broadly, ideational factors back into the study of international relations’ (Thomas 2005: 69). But Thomas also complains that constructivists have not ‘adequately considered the role of culture and religion’ (2005: 93). In his view, there is something more fundamental about religion in the sense that it is more deeply embedded in actors’ identities and thus less open to change. In any case, constructivism is a useful perspective through which to examine the discourses and narratives influenced by religion and to assess how religious elements play a role in shaping the identities and interests of political actors (Sandal and Fox 2013). Finally, from a post-positivist perspective, religion can also be seen as a tool of power. This view might be said to echo Karl Marx’s famous dictum that ‘religion is the opium of the people’ (Bush 2014: 43, 172). This connects to the larger debate about the actual importance of religion in today’s international politics. Is it really relevant to talk about a ‘resurgence of religion’ or is it merely ‘a growing awareness of global manifestations of political religion by the Western world, and the perception that they are often intimately connected to core Western security interests?’ (Haynes 2006: 539). There is no general agreement on the appropriate view of religion; what seems certain, however, is that a plurality of different approaches—existing and perhaps to some extent new ones—will be needed in order to provide a full analysis of religion in IR.

## 11.5 Balance and Hegemony in World History

The subject of international relations was born after the First World War in an attempt to understand the dynamics of the Western state system, the first international system with global reach (Buzan and Lawson 2015; see Chapter 1). There have always been scholars who criticized the extent to which IR theorizing is based on this particular context (e.g., Wight 1977; Watson 1992; see Chapter 5). Nonetheless, the vast majority of research within IR has been rather narrowly bound up on the Western state system (Buzan and Little 2000; Møller 2020). Most of what we know about what states are and how they interact is based on this system as it developed over the last 1,000 years and came to fruition as the ‘Westphalian system’ (see Chapter 1). A striking example is the notion, found most prominently in neorealism, that international systems are likely to move towards a balance of power—or, at a minimum, that ‘sustained hegemonies rarely if ever arise in state systems’ (Levy 2004: 35; see Chapter 3). This generalization clearly owes much to the European system, which has seen a number of aborted attempts to create hegemony due to great power balancing (Levy and Thompson 2005: 5; 2010: 13–14).

This single-minded empirical focus sits uneasily with the fact that many IR theories have much broader ambitions. For instance, neorealists offer sweeping generalizations about international relations throughout history and frequently refer to other state systems to bolster their claims. Kenneth Waltz's basic generalization that 'hegemony leads to balance' is one that applies 'through all centuries we can contemplate' (Waltz 1993: 77; cf. Kaufman et al. 2007: 5). Indeed, Waltz's (1997: 15) categorical claim that '[a]s nature abhors a vacuum, so international politics abhors unbalanced power' is formulated in a way that claims universal validity for all phases of history (Nexon 2009: 337).

In recent decades, scholars have begun to question the extent to which the lessons from the European or Western state system can be generalized (Buzan and Little 2000; Nexon 2009; Buzan and Lawson 2015: 10–11). This historical research agenda began as an attempt to come to terms with the current world order, or more particularly the dominant position of the United States in the period after the end of the Cold War (e.g., Kaufman 1997: 174; Wilkinson 1999: 141; Nexon 2009: 331). The situation made scholars ponder whether such dominance is a stable outcome—and, if not, what is likely to replace it? A new line of research attempts to answer these questions by studying earlier historical instances of domination and hegemony. This new literature asks how other historical state systems have operated and how they differ from the European system. It draws on insights from mainstream IR theories such as neorealism and International Society theories but it also integrates insights about domestic politics and state formation.

### 11.5.1 Mapping State Systems

We start by mapping the state systems that have been investigated by this historical research. The definition of a state system differs somewhat from scholar to scholar but there is a consensus about the essentials. Most scholarship agrees with Bull and Watson's (1984: 1) definition: states comprise a state system when 'the behaviour of each is a necessary factor in the calculation of others' (see Chapter 5; see also Bull 1977: 10; Kaufman et al. 2007: 6). In this sense, all state systems prior to the present one were regional, as distances hindered global or even transcontinental interactions (Wohlforth et al. 2007: 158). For instance, though the Europeans of Antiquity and the Middle Ages knew about the existence of India and, more dimly, China, the cost of travel and of projecting power over large distances meant that these Asian states did not have to be factored in by the states that made up the European system. Likewise, East Asians rulers did not have to take European great powers into consideration when operating in their regional system. This only became necessary when Europeans took control of the Eastern seas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Buzan and Lawson 2015: 2).

The European state system and its offspring, the present global system, make up the best-known system in world history (see Chapter 1). But there have been numerous other state systems. Kaufman et al. (2007) survey 7,500 years of history and identify forty-plus different state systems (Wohlforth et al. 2007: 161: fn. 4; see also Wilkinson 1999; 2004). Of course, the number depends on how we count. As Kaufman et al. (2007) show, each of these systems could be broken down further, which would increase the tally tremendously. In an earlier work, Kaufman (1997: 186) teases out at least twenty different state systems in the Middle East in the period 2400–100 BCE.



**TABLE 11.1** Different conceptualizations of state system outcomes

SCHOLAR(S)	OUTCOMES				
		Absolute independence	Hegemony	Dominion	Empire
Watson (1992)					
Kaufman (1997)	Fragmented multipolarity	Multipolarity	Dual hegemony	Single hegemony	Imperial hegemony
Wilkinson (1999)	Nonpolarity	Multipolarity Bipolarity Tripolarity	Nonhegemonic unipolarity	Hegemony	Universal empire
Kaufman et al. (2007)	Nonpolarity	Multipolarity	Bipolarity	Unipolarity	Hegemonic

Note: Kaufman (1997) also operates with the outcome 'fragmented system' but this characterizes a situation where there is no genuine state system.

Among non-European cases, most attention has been devoted to the ancient state systems in the Middle East (Kaufman 1997; Wilkinson 1999; Kaufman et al. 2007) and to the ancient Chinese multistate system (Lewis 1999; Hui 2005). The Middle East system is the first confirmed international system in world history, tracing its beginnings all the way back to the third millennium BCE (Mann 1986; Scott 2017). The Chinese system is the progenitor to what may be seen as the most important state in world history, China. Both systems appear to have developed in isolation from other systems (Watson 1992: 22, 85).

What shape did these state systems take and how did they develop over time? The spectrum runs from a genuine balance of power or multipolarity at one end to complete hegemony or full imperialization at the other. By balance of power, scholars normally mean some kind of power equilibrium between states in the system, manifesting itself in either multipolarity or bipolarity (Nexon 2009: 335; Wohlforth et al. 2007: 156). By empire, they mean a situation where one state has rolled up the system, either directly by conquering and annexing all other states or indirectly by making them vassals or clients (Watson 1992: 13–14). In this sense, empire can be understood as the most extreme version of hegemony. But as illustrated in Table 11.1, there is quite some variation in which categories scholars situate between these extremes.

To get a better sense of these distinctions, we can turn to one of the most famous state systems, the one comprising the Middle East and, gradually, the entire Mediterranean in classical antiquity (400 BCE to 380 AD). Kaufman et al. (2007: 248) code this as follows:

- 400–350 BCE: Unipolar (Persia)
- 340 BCE: Bipolar (Macedon–Persia)
- 330 BCE: Hegemony (Macedon)
- 320–200 BCE: Multipolar



**TABLE 11.2** Kaufman et al.'s overview of different system polarities (DECADES, %)

SYSTEM	MULTIPOLAR	BIPOLAR	UNIPOLAR	HEGEMONIC
Ancient Mideast (1500–400 BCE)	60 (54.5)	6 (5.5)	38 (34.5)	6 (5.5)
East Asia (1025 BCE–1875 AD)	107.5 (37.7)	35 (12.3)	85 (29.8)	57.5 (20.2)
South Asia (400 BCE–1810 AD)	26 (12.7)	68 (33.3)	73 (35.8)	37 (18.1)
Classical Med. (400 BCE–390 AD)	13 (16.5)	1 (1.3)	18 (22.8)	47 (59.5)
Modern Europe (1500–2000 AD)	41 (82.0)	8 (16.0)	1 (2.0)	0 (0.0)
Total frequencies	247.5 (34.0)	118 (16.2)	215 (29.5)	147.5 (20.3)

Note: Adapted from Kaufman et al. (2007: 231), who builds on Wilkinson (2004). The calculation of the percentages includes 22 decades of nonpolarity, which are not included in the table.

- 190–80 BCE: Unipolar (Rome)
- 70 BCE–380 AD: Hegemony (Rome)

The state system of classical antiquity thus saw most of the outcomes included in Table 11.1. The dominant pattern was unipolarity or hegemony, but we also find a longer period of multipolarity. What were the more general patterns across historical state systems?

Table 11.2 reports Kaufman et al.'s (2007) overview of 7,500 years of world history, broken down into the four outcomes of multipolarity, bipolarity, unipolarity, and hegemony. The tallies are reported in decades and percentages.

The overview shows that balanced and unbalanced outcomes have been roughly equally common in world history. But the table also confirms that the European system after 1500 is the only major system where balanced outcomes have clearly predominated. Kaufman et al. (2007: 20) accordingly conclude that '[u]nipolarity is a normal circumstance in world history'.

This is further corroborated by the eight in-depth case-studies of state systems that are included in Kaufman et al.'s (2007) work. These systems include, *inter alia*, the Ancient Middle Eastern system (900–600 BCE), the Greek City-State system before and after the Roman ascendancy (fifth century BCE–200 BCE), the Ancient Indian System (600–232 BCE), the Ancient Chinese System (656–221 BCE), state systems in Central America and the Andes (1400–1800 AD), and the East Asian system (1300–1900 AD).

The key finding in all eight cases is that hegemony at some point succeeded where balance had previously obtained (Kaufman et al. 2007: 229). Hence, '[b]alances frequently form, but they always break down' (232). We find numerous examples of this

### BOX 11.17 Key Developments: Aspirations for hegemonic dominance that failed in Europe, 1000–1945

- Eleventh century: Henry III and Henry IV (Salian dynasty)
- Twelfth–thirteenth century: Frederick Barbarossa and Frederick II (Hohenstaufen dynasty)
- Sixteenth century: Charles V and Philip II (Habsburg dynasty)
- Eighteenth century: Louis XIV (Bourbon dynasty)
- Nineteenth century: Napoleon Bonaparte
- Twentieth century: Adolf Hitler

in the Ancient Middle East system, which was characterized by an oscillation between balanced and unbalanced outcomes (see also Kaufman 1997). But when we look at the evidence reported in Table 11.2, we also find more lasting instances of hegemony or empire. The most famous example is the Chinese. The ancient Chinese state system gave way to universal empire in 221 BCE and after that, Chinese emperors never looked back. Even though China experienced several periods of internal division, sometimes lasting centuries, the Chinese area never saw the re-emergence of a genuine multistate system (Mote 1999). This had huge consequences for the broader East Asian state system. For most of the period after unification, China exerted a relatively stable hegemony over the rest of this system, even though the Chinese rarely tried to conquer the other members of the system, including most importantly Vietnam, South Korea, Japan and, a bit further afield, Indonesia (Kang 2007).

In a nutshell, the historical variation fits poorly with the notion that state systems tend to equilibrate on a balance of power (see also Watson 1992; Kaufman 1997; Wilkinson 1999; Hui 2005; Møller 2014). Most state systems have seen a development in the direction of hegemony, sometimes resulting in genuine empire. With the exception of China and the East Asian system, these hegemonies have usually collapsed at some point, after which the cycle has begun again (Kaufman 1997; Wilkinson 1999).

The recent attempts to map international developments in other historical state systems show us something important about the European system, namely that it is the only one that has repeatedly moved towards balance, as hegemonic aspirations have been fought off by successful anti-hegemonic coalitions (see Box 11.17). This even occurred when the power of the would-be hegemon was overwhelming. For instance, though no single state was successful in resisting Louis XIV's France in the late seventeenth century, a general anti-hegemonic alliance that included Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Austria still succeeded in curbing French power (Wilkinson 1999: 150; Blanning 2007: 534–56). The European system therefore emerges as the historical exception, not the norm (Wilkinson 1999: 154; Møller 2014: 660); 'Europe is the only system for which all balance-of-power theorists agree that great powers have systematically balanced against hegemonic threats' (Levy and Thompson 2005: 5; Levy 2004: 38–41). But because this system has been so dominant in IR theorizing,

**BOX 11.18** Key Arguments: The swings of time's pendulum

The basic starting point for any theory of international relations must be Watson's image of time's pendulum swinging between balanced and unbalanced distributions of power.

**Kaufman et al. (2007: 244)**

its exceptional characteristics have not been taken fully in. Two issues cry out for explanation:

1. Why did state systems so often develop in the direction of unipolarity/hegemony or even empire?
2. Why does the European state system diverge?

### 11.5.2 Strong and Weak Balance of Power Theories

The attempt to answer the first question has taken the form of a critique of balance of power theory. Balance of power theory predicts that large increases in power in dominant states will trigger balancing efforts by other states. This occurs internally through what neorealists call 'emulation', as states copy domestic reforms that have proven successful elsewhere, and it occurs externally via alliances against would-be hegemons. According to balance of power theory, this combination of internal and external balancing means that state systems repeatedly equilibrate on some sort of balance and avoid long-term universal domination (Waltz 1979: 121; Levy 2004: 35; Schweller 2006: 4–5; cf. Nexon 2009: 335).

However, as Nexon (2009: 337–8) points out, we can distinguish between strong and weak versions of balance of power theory. The weaker version merely holds that balancing mechanisms operate, while recognizing that they do not always produce outcomes of balance. Only the strong versions predict that the outcome of balancing is necessarily balance. The new literature on historical state systems recognizes this distinction between systemic outcomes (e.g., balance) and state behaviour (e.g., balancing) (Nexon 2009: 331). In their historical investigation of state systems, Kaufman et al. (2007: 10) assess both the outcome at the level of the state system and the process (including efforts of balancing). This also means that they register if unipolarity or hegemony succeeded *despite* internal and external balancing. They construe this as a test that is friendly to balance of power theory because one might confirm balancing even in the absence of balance.

Surveying the new research on historical state systems, what are the conclusions? The findings of the scholarship presented by e.g. Kaufman (1997), Wilkinson (1999; 2004), Hui (2004; 2005), Kaufman et al. (2007), and Møller (2014) is that balancing often failed both internally and externally. Internally, it repeatedly faced collective action problems (Olson 1965; cf. Wohlforth et al. 2007: 158; Kaufman et al. 2007: 241). The main internal impediment to emulation is that the necessary reforms are often costly to elite groups

**BOX 11.19** Key Developments: Poland's suicide?

The elective monarchy of Poland had continued to flourish throughout the seventeenth century, reaching its apogee [peak] with the reign of John Sobieski (1674–96), who commanded the army which relieved Vienna from the Turkish siege, probably the greatest triumph in Poland's 800 years of history. But after Sobieski's death the decline of the Polish State was rapid. A handful of magnates, politically irresponsible, gave themselves up to internal rivalry, having elected to the throne two Saxon rulers for whom none could find respect . . . Yet, at the very moment when the magnates had lapsed into feudal bickering, the Russian State to the east was assuming the full panoply [full array] of Tsardom, while Brandenburg to the west had become the Kingdom of Prussia. Liberal writers everywhere subsequently condemned the Partitions of Poland as a crime; but was it murder, or suicide?

**Palmer (1970: 21)**

(Nexon 2009: 349). History contains numerous examples of states that failed to emulate other states because powerful internal groups resisted change. We even find examples of this in the staunchly competitive European state system. The most famous is the former great power Poland; in the late eighteenth century it was partitioned between its neighbours Austria, Prussia, and Russia, following a failure to reform its political regime and upgrade its military (see Box 11.19).

Externally, balancing often failed because states were more preoccupied with the local, smaller threat than the distant, larger threat. For instance, the city-states of ancient Greece were good at guarding against each other—Athens against Sparta and Sparta against Athens to merely mention the most famous rivalry—but they did not close ranks against the more fundamental threat posed by the Romans further afield. On the contrary, Greek city-states repeatedly enlisted Roman help to keep would-be conquerors such as the Seleucid Empire in check, only to see Rome replace Seleucid domination with full imperialization.

The historical research on previous state systems also shows that some states were able to mobilize their economies and militaries for warfare in a more effective way than other states. Kaufman et al. (2007: 229, 241) single out the ability to increase administrative capacity via reforms as the key to hegemony (see also Hui 2005). This made it possible to overcome the rising cost of expansion due to control of ever larger areas, what Boulding (1962) once termed the 'loss of strength gradient'.

However, the new research makes clear that, given this inherent potential for hegemony, the main reason for absence of domination is also internal: it has to do with imperial overstretch. There is a large body of research on this issue (Kennedy 1987). The simple point is that would-be conquerors had to stop at some point to avoid the fatigue that follows from overstretching chains of command and overburdening administrative and military resources. The Chinese Empire endured because rulers were aware that there were limits to how far they could go (Kang 2007). Chinese rulers were satisfied

with their hegemonic status and, with a few but notable exceptions, did not try to annex neighbouring states such as Vietnam, Korea, and Japan.

Historical research shows that even within established systems, external balancing sometimes failed because collective action problems hindered effective responses. For instance, many states would pass the buck, that is, refrain from joining anti-hegemonic alliances in the hope that others would carry the burden of balancing or even to reap advantages by appeasing the would-be hegemon. Napoleon repeatedly used divide-and-conquer tactics to avoid all of his enemies allying against him, at least until the aborted invasion of Russia in 1812 had undermined his position. Even when we find effective responses, these sometimes opened up new avenues for domination. Earlier, we mentioned the example of Greek city-states enlisting the assistance of the Romans against the ‘local enemy’ and therefore unwittingly paving the way for the widening of the Roman Empire.

### 11.5.3 Why Europe?

So, why did the European state system differ? The European development poses what Wohlforth et al. (2007: 156) term a ‘foundational question’ of IR: ‘Whether and under what conditions the competitive behavior of states leads to some sort of equilibrium?’ (see also Schweller 2006: 11; Levy and Thompson 2010: 40–1). Returning to the third question in Box 11.1, to what extent do conventional IR theories contribute to answering this question?

The answer from neoclassical realism is that anarchy incentivizes states to balance against each other but that their response depends on internal political conditions (Nixon 2009: 333; see Chapter 3). For instance, Schweller (2006) argues that domestic conditions sometimes mean that states ‘underbalance’ (see Chapter 3) in the face of mighty enemies. It follows that while the international system cannot in itself generate a balance of power equilibrium, it can do so under certain conditions internal to the states. If so, a plausible explanation for the European outcome (indeed for any outcome in a state system) must integrate systemic pressures and domestic factors.

In this vein of thinking, Kaufman (1997), Wilkinson (1999), and Møller (2014) propose more specific theories explaining why Europe differs from other states systems. All of these focus on internal characteristics of the European polities. The key to the European development was the existence of ‘a competitive social environment where powerful social groups could balance off rulers’ power’ (Vu 2010: 159; see e.g., Tilly 1990; Downing 1992; Ertman 1997; Hui 2005; Stasavage 2010; Møller 2014). This development owes much to the vibrant European cities. But the strong European nobilities and the independent Catholic Church also weighed in and contributed to the relatively even state-society relations that we find in much of Europe from the Middle Ages onwards (Møller 2018; 2020; Doucette and Møller 2020). These insights can be accommodated within the framework of neoclassical realism with its focus on how domestic conditions mediate the effects of external pressure.

Other IR theories also help shed light on the surprising vitality of balance in the European state system. International Society scholars emphasize the developments of strong norms about international relations in general and the balance of power in particular. In the European system, the balance of power became increasingly valued by

the great powers, and it ended up as one of the primary institutions of the international society that gradually arose in Europe. This both directly inhibited the hegemonic aspirations of rulers and it made it easier to counter such aspirations by fostering anti-hegemon coalitions (Bull and Watson 1984; Watson 1992). The Concert of Europe is a good illustration of the normative power of the idea about power balances. It was created after the Napoleonic wars to avoid a repeat of a drive for domination *à la* Napoleon (see Chapter 5).

Liberals have so far been less engaged in the historical debate about hegemony and balance, but their emphasis on interdependence and institutions seems relevant. Here, we can once more quote the French nineteenth-century economist Frederic Bastiat's famous words: 'When goods do not cross borders, soldiers will.' The increased economic interdependence in the period after the Napoleonic wars made balance and peaceful relations all the more profitable for the great powers. The Concert of Europe can also be interpreted as a liberal arrangement which helped prevent great power wars for most of the nineteenth century.

Finally, what have constructivists and post-positivists brought to this debate? The constructivist insight that international systems are shaped by the interactions and perceptions of actors is very much borne out by the historical overview presented in this chapter (see Ruggie 1983; Wendt 1992). It is clearly the case that some systems have had a far higher tolerance of hegemony than others. The East Asian system where—for centuries if not millennia—China exercised a rather constant hegemony that did not spark much opposition is the best contrast to the fiercely competitive European experience (Kang 2007).

Constructivists have also refined some of the more specific neorealist arguments about balancing and balance of power. A good example is Barnett's (1996) objection that Stephen Walt's version of defensive neorealism deals in too simplistic a way with 'intentions' (see Chapter 3). Barnett argues that intentions reflect ideas and not solely material factors. For instance, the identity of the state—democracy versus non-democracy, Arab versus non-Arab—often explains which allies one chooses, especially if we are not talking about desperate do-or-die situations. In a recent contribution, Gause (2017) shows how such ideational factors have created 'underbalancing' against Iran in the Middle East, particularly because it has been difficult for Sunni-Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt to ally with Israel against Shiite Iran. A similar argument can be made about many historical balance of power dynamics, including the failure of most European great powers to systematically ally with the Ottoman Empire.

The post-positivist argument that the European story has exerted a form of hegemony in IR is also amply confirmed by the historical overview provided above. On this point, the post-positivist message reminds one of American sociologist Jack Goldstone's (2000: 176–7) provocative observation that the European colonizers have colonized history. At the same time, this insight tells us little about the actual dynamics of other state systems.

#### 11.5.4 Implications for the Current State System

Balance of power theory was revived by Waltz (1979), and it remains one of the most important touchstones of IR. But it has encountered much criticism following the eclipse of bipolarity in 1989 (Nexon 2009: 330–1). The American dominance in the decades after

the breakdown of communism seems to belie the key insight of balance of power theory, namely that a lack of balance begets balancing efforts.

It is very much this 'new normal' that has sparked research into previous state systems. As Nexon (2009: 353) points out, the simple fact is that balance of power theory, at least in the strong version where balancing always leads to balance, does not fare well when confronted with this historical variation. While we do find many instances of balance, they were nothing like a natural tendency and they would often make way for some kind of hegemony after a while. Moreover, the case of China underscores the potential stability of empire or hegemony. So, outside of the European state system, unbalanced outcomes such as unipolarity, hegemony, and even empire turn out to have been an 'old normal' as well. On this basis, one may argue that neorealist Kenneth Waltz, who has been a dominant voice in the debate about power balancing, was wrong. International Society theorist Adam Watson, much less listened to, was right (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 5).

Scholars have used these findings to reflect on whether the current American dominance is stable and what might be lying in wait in the future (e.g., Kaufman 1997; Wilkinson 1999). For instance, Wilkinson (1999: 141) discusses a number of potential exits from the post-1989 American position of what he terms 'nonhegemonic unipolarity'. However, he also notes that the post-Cold War American dominance has plenty of precedents in world history; indeed, unipolarity has actually been a quite common outcome outside of the European state system. The new historical research also shows that there was nothing inevitable about the modern, global state system. Other outcomes could have prevailed, and the Europe-spawned world that IR theorizing is so indebted to is only one instance of a much wider historical repertoire. These insights should assist us in making sense of the emerging world order. A good example is Barry Buzan's (2014: 180) recent assertion that regional international systems are likely to stage a comeback as 'universalist Western values will be more subject to cultural challenge' in a situation where the power of the Western countries is waning (see also Buzan 2014: 45–7; Buzan and Lawson 2015). The East Asian system, organized around China, might, for example, reappear in a new version as a consequence of the economic and military 'rise of China'. Anyone who wishes to understand these dynamics would do well to study how the East Asian system functioned until it was engulfed by the European system in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## 11.6 Conclusion

We have looked at four contemporary issues in IR and discussed the ways in which they are handled by IR theory. The nature of the theoretical challenge to IR posed by these issues depends on one's valuation of what is actually at stake. Radical views demand radical solutions. A radical view of climate change, for example, demands that we reconsider our whole way of thinking about IR. These radical interpretations point away from traditional IR approaches, but the conceptual and theoretical directions taken are not at all the same. This brings us back to a point made in Chapter 2 about the three main factors that influence IR thinking. The first is changes in the real world which keep throwing up new issues, such as those taken up in this chapter. The second is debates between



IR scholars both within and between different traditions. Such debates help us come to a decision about the challenge posed by different issues and what the consequences will be for the discipline. The third element is the influence of other areas of scholarship, especially debates about methodology in a broad sense.

The joint shaping of IR thinking by these three main factors is an ongoing process. There is no end station where scholars can sit back and proclaim that IR thinking is finally developed to perfection. History does not stand still. Intellectual inquiry does not stop. There are always new issues to confront, new methods to apply, and new insights to discover. There are always new generations of scholars inquiring into them. Scholars are not architects working on buildings that will one day be finished. There is no one blueprint; there are several: some plans are abandoned, others are adopted. Scholars are more like travellers with different maps and open-ended tickets. A textbook such as this one is a sort of unfinished travelogue of IR. We know where the journey began, and we know about the main stations visited so far. But we are less certain about where IR will go from here because old and new travellers will continue the debate about the best direction to take and the proper places to visit on the way. Some of you reading this book might eventually take IR to destinations that we have never dreamt of.

## \* Key points

- There is now irrefutable evidence that the Earth has warmed during the latest centuries, that this trend is accelerating, and that it is mainly caused by the human emission of greenhouse gasses since the Industrial Revolution. New scholarship suggests that climate change forces us to rethink our approaches to IR, both in a substantial and in a normative sense.
- Since the 1980s, we have seen a number of international initiatives to address climate change. But by now it seems clear that responses are not only delayed, they repeatedly fall short of what is needed to actually address the problem of global warming.
- Traditional IR theories have different predictions about the prospects of effectively mitigating climate change. However, green theorists claim that traditional IR theory, with its state-centric assumptions, is in itself an obstacle to effective solutions.
- International terrorism has revived the spectre of physical security threats to states and societies in the OECD world. It is not an overriding, existential menace, but it is a clear threat to public security that must be taken seriously.
- The 'clash of civilizations' is not a defining feature of post-Cold War world order; but questions of identity and religion play an important role in contemporary IR.
- The end of the Cold War and the subsequent American unipolarity sparked a more general debate about the balance of power in multistate systems. A series of historical analyses show that power balances frequently form but also frequently break down as balancing proves



ineffective. The great exception is the European state system, where power balancing and balanced outcomes have been the norm for a millennium. This finding challenges the neo-realist notion of the balance of power and it means that we cannot generalize the European experience. However, it might help us to understand the future development of the present state system.

- The nature of the challenge to IR posed by these issues depends on one's valuation of what is at stake. A radical view of the climate change issue demands that we reconsider our whole way of thinking about IR, for example. Many scholars who study the non-traditional issues are less radical and more prone to operate within existing traditions in IR.

## ? Questions

- How serious is the problem of global warming? What are the consequences for IR?
- What is 'Tragedy of the Commons' and to what extent does it shed light on why the international actors have failed to adequately respond to climate change?
- Are proponents of 'green theory' correct that we need to transcend traditional state-centric approaches to fully understand and deal with climate change? Why or why not?
- Should international terrorism be the top issue on the international agenda?
- Is religion a relevant new issue in IR? Why or why not?
- What is the difference between the balance of power and power balancing? To what extent has the balance of power been a general phenomenon in world history? Does the European experience differ from the historical norm? If so, how?
- Is it necessary to integrate international and domestic factors to make sense of the issues presented in this chapter? Give examples.
- Does the arrival of 'new issues' in IR mean that the discipline will have to be fundamentally changed and some or all of the established ways of thinking will have to be discarded? Why or why not?

## ■ Guide to further reading

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## CHAPTER 12

# The Big Question: World Order or World Chaos?

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### Summary

These are turbulent times and many of us probably fear where global relations are heading: towards order or chaos? This final chapter discusses what theories of IR have to say about this issue. The chapter first sets the parameters of the debate about world order and it maps different understandings of the concept. It then discusses the consequences of the rise of China and the resurgence of Russian influence, the manifold new challenges facing established democracies in particular Europe and North America, and the much more serious problems that are making life precarious in parts of the Global South. Finally, the chapter turns to international institutions and their ability to provide global governance. The chapter ends by concluding that things are far better than many pessimists make them out to be, but also very far from meeting present-day aspirations for world order.

## 12.1 Introduction

The English novelist Charles Dickens wrote about the period up until the French Revolution that '[i]t was the best of times, it was the worst of times'. One could easily feel tempted to say the same about the present era. Never before has the potential for material well-being and the promise of technology and human cooperation been higher; never have the challenges posed by progress seemed larger. In official UN terms, the stated ambition of world politics is the good life for all. In real terms, many people think that chaos is in the making. Where are we, then, in terms of world order? In the discipline of International Relations, this debate is primarily going on between liberal optimists and sceptical realists. Liberals point to processes of cooperation, convergence, shared values, and general progress in an increasingly liberal world (Mahbubani 2013); realists emphasize conflict, divergence, the lack of shared values, and the potential for regress in a context of rivalry and competition (Mearsheimer 2018; 2019). Several other observers, with a variety of theoretical orientations, have of course made contributions to the debate about world order; they will also be introduced in what follows. We shall argue that both liberal optimists and sceptical realists make valid points but that both perspectives also have significant shortcomings.

Let us start by providing some context. The end of the Cold War was a great triumph for liberal democracies: Political and economic liberalism could celebrate a complete victory over planned economies and autocratic socialism. It seemed as if liberal democracy and the liberal market economy could now be installed in all countries of the world; the history of grand ideological struggles had ended (Fukuyama 1989, 1992). Peace, cooperation, security, common values, welfare and even the good life for all would eventually follow in a new, global and strong liberal world order (some formulations in what follows draw on Sørensen 2016).

There were early warnings that this scenario was too optimistic. Already in the 1990s, realist scholars predicted that old friends would turn on each other now that the common enemy was gone (Mearsheimer 1993). Moreover, liberal hubris might produce an arrogant form of liberal universalism which would amount to liberal imperialism. Such behaviour would help produce a clash of civilizations and, increasingly, future conflicts would appear at the fault lines of civilizations, especially between Western states, on the one hand, and Islamic and Confucian states-cum-civilizations, on the other (Huntington 1993, 1996; Sørensen 2011).

Liberal optimism did not back down; an analysis from the late 1990s argued that ever more sophisticated economies would need to enter into increasingly closer networks of cooperation. Nation-states would remain the major units in international politics, but would be compelled to closer cooperation in order to provide a protective umbrella for a globalized economy (Rosecrance 1999; see also Ikenberry 2006).

Then came 11 September 2001, and transformed the international agenda. The United States embarked on a global war on terror, which led to the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq; both continue to this day. Later in that decade, the globalized market economy was shaken to its foundations. The Global Financial Crisis that broke in 2008 disturbed—and for a nerve-racking moment, threatened to short-circuit—the entire economic system; North America and Western Europe were hit the hardest. The world

**BOX 12.1 Key Developments: The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008**

By 2009, 14.3 trillion dollars, or 33 per cent of the value of the world's companies, was wiped out by the GFC.

**Steger (2017: 51)**

Hedge funds have made massive leveraged credit bets, knowing that their upside is billions in fees, and their downside is millions in fees.

**Tavakoli (2008)**

economy did not break down, but the massive financial speculation and fraud provoked a debate about the health and viability of the capitalist model, including the proper relationship between free market forces and political regulation (see Box 12.1).

*Time Magazine* pronounced the 2000s 'a decade from hell', the 'most dispiriting' years Americans had lived through since the Second World War (Serwer 2009). The question is whether the 2010s present a brighter picture. This decade saw popular reactions to the serious problems that had already emerged earlier. The financial crisis unveiled the downsides of a global market economy that is also plagued by sharply increasing inequalities within and among countries. Protest movements in France, Chile, Italy, and elsewhere have drawn headlines, and political elites are under fire from new, anti-establishment contenders that claim to better represent the people. Across Western Europe and North America, populist parties and politicians have capitalized on the anger among parts of the population that feel left behind economically or alienated culturally in an era of globalization and increasing socioeconomic inequality (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; see Box 12.2).

**BOX 12.2 Key Concepts: Populism as a two-edged sword**

Populism is a set of political ideas that pits the will of the people against a conspiring elite and tends to frame the world as a battle between good and evil ... Populist rhetoric ... can be found both on the right and left.

**Evans (2020)**

Depending on its electoral power and the context in which it arises, populism can work as *either* a threat to *or* a corrective for democracy ... populism is essentially democratic, but at odds with *liberal* democracy ... [it often invokes] the principle of popular sovereignty to criticize those independent institutions seeking to protect fundamental rights that are inherent to liberal democracy ... populism can develop into a form of democratic extremism or, better said, of illiberal democracy.

**Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017: 79–82)**

It is now clear to almost everyone that climate change is a fundamental global challenge, but effective solutions are in short supply (see Chapter 11). The COVID-19 outbreak that began in 2020 showed that globalization is increasing our vulnerability to the spread of diseases which might culminate in pandemics, and which might take a frightening economic and social toll (see also McGuire 2005). Meanwhile, the problem of fragile states has gone from bad to worse with the civil war in Syria and the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban, and Europe faces a flood of refugees from the Middle East and parts of Africa. Mass migration is a political problem elsewhere in the Global North, and liberal democracies are having a hard time providing an effective response in line with liberal values (Koser 2016). This challenge will not go away in the coming decades and it is putting established parties in especially Western European democracies under pressure.

Digitalization has made us dependent on the Internet on an everyday basis, but that is a trivial problem compared to other aspects of new technologies: mass surveillance of every detail of our lives is now undertaken, not merely by autocratic governments, but also by liberal democracies. The National Security Agency of the United States outlined its new surveillance posture already in 2011, in six protocols: ‘Sniff It All, Know It All, Collect It All, Process It All, Exploit It All, Partner It All’ (Snowden 2019: 222). Terrorist attacks have increased demands for national security, but such security creates a serious tension with another fundamental liberal value: individual freedom.

And of course technology is affecting our societies and political systems in much broader ways than this. The relatively sudden advent of machine-learning techniques and ‘big data’ is raising difficult questions because many of the new technologies are opaque, for two reasons. First, due to proprietary technology (firms such as Facebook and Google treating their algorithms as commercial secrets), second, due to the inherent complexity that results from these techniques learning from data in ways that are difficult to comprehend for the human mind. Earlier optimism about the use of new computer technologies has therefore given way to fears about ‘techlash’ (Atkinson et al. 2019). There is now a large new literature discussing how this will affect international order and democracy, leading to 24/7 surveillance and even repression (Wright 2018; Feldstein 2019).

At the same time, fundamental institutions of the liberal world order, such as free trade and the NATO alliance, are being questioned anew because they are seen to go against short-term national interests. This happens in a period when the global influence of China, Russia, and Iran is rising.

In sum, you can easily argue that the 2010s are more of ‘a decade from hell’ than the 2000s (Geraghty 2019). Most people would agree; a few years ago, YouGov (2016) asked 18,000 adults from seventeen countries, ‘do you think the world is getting better or worse, or neither better nor worse?’ Two-thirds said ‘worse’; a mere 1 per cent in France, 2 in Germany, 2 in Britain, 6 in the US, and 8 in Denmark said ‘better’.

Hidden behind this pessimism, however, are data that point to solid global progress over time (Pinker 2018; Rosling 2019). The proportion of the world’s population living in extreme poverty has almost halved in the last twenty years. Global life expectancy has increased from just above forty years in 1950 to seventy years today; 80 per cent of one-year-old children are now vaccinated; 60 per cent of girls in low-income countries

finish primary school; much fewer people than earlier die in violent conflict or natural disasters.

Moreover, while many international problems are clearly not attended to in an effective way by states and international institutions, this does not mean that there is no international cooperation. On the contrary, since the Second World War—a blink of the eye in historical terms—we have seen a spectacular development of increased international economic interdependence and stronger international and regional institutions; what Michael Zürn (2018) refers to as a ‘global governance system’. This development, which means that international cooperation today has much stronger underpinnings than was the case before the Second World War or during the Cold War, is often missed by those who look at changes in a short-term perspective.

Add to this that recent studies have concluded that the period after 1995 has been remarkably politically stable in the sense that the global number of political regime changes has been historically low; since the French Revolution, only the three decades before the First World War saw less frequent regime changes (Djuve et al. 2020: 949–50). Democracy might be on the defensive at the moment (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019) but, if so, it is yielding ground very reluctantly, and the backslide may not last.

But improvements over time do not mean that there are no problems left in the world. Perhaps the number of problems have even accumulated over the last few decades. The point is, as emphasized by Rosling (2019: 71), that things can be both better and bad at the same time. That is the general background for the perennial discussion about world order. This is a big debate, because it contains several different components. At the very least, we should examine:

1. The concept of world order itself, with a particular emphasis on how it has changed over time.
2. The distribution of power, including the rise of China, the resurgence of Russian influence, and the consequences for world order.
3. New challenges in old democracies: the economic, political and social changes in the established democracies on both sides of the Atlantic.
4. Fragile states in the Global South with high levels of domestic conflict.
5. International institutions and their ability to deliver global governance.

## 12.2 The Concept of World Order

The concept of world order is ‘essentially contested’ (Gallie 1956); there is no agreement about what it actually means and how it should be defined. The ‘thin’ version of world order stems from the realist tradition. On this view, violent conflict between states is always a possibility because of the anarchic international system. Order, then, is when sovereign states are able to live in relative peace among each other and to uphold their security and independence (Bull 1995: 16–19). There was order in this thin sense during the ‘Concert of Europe’ in the nineteenth century (see Chapter 5). The bipolar system after the Second World War also upheld a relatively stable order based on the balance



of power (Waltz 1979). The first decades after the breakdown of communism in 1989 saw the emergence of an order which on the surface was based on liberal ideas about economic exchange and international institutions, but which was in reality contingent on American hegemony, realists say (Mearsheimer 2018). The current challenge to this order is the retreat of American leadership and the rise of new great powers such as China and India (and the return of old ones such as Russia). The combined effect is the shake-up of the balance of power and the weakening of American hegemony.

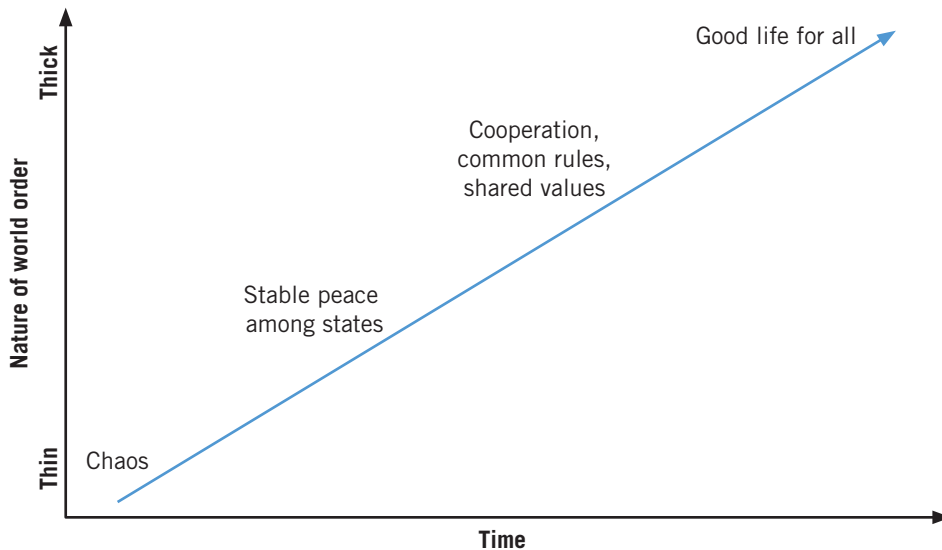
The liberal version of order is much more ambitious than the realist one, because it foresees closer cooperation and the spread of common (liberal) rules in a world where states increasingly share liberal values. Such was the order that prevailed briefly among Western democracies after the First World War and more permanently after the Second World War. The ambition was to establish a global liberal order when the Cold War ended. To liberals, this is ultimately a result of modernization and globalization processes which, in Thomas L. Friedman's (2005) formulation, means that *The World Is Flat*. The result is that the old state-centric international order is increasingly being replaced by a global-centric international order. Social constructivists with a liberal bent emphasize the role of human agency in this process; with Alexander Wendt's (1992) well-known one-liner, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It'.

Finally, scholars associated with the International Society tradition have emphasized that we might be looking at a future which is best understood via a combination of the realist and liberal perspectives on world order: a number of 'thicker' regional orders (including a liberal order in Western Europe organized around the EU or Western liberal democracies more generally) nested in a 'thin' or at least more thinly-stretched overarching world order (Buzan 2014).

So far, the international society of states has officially endorsed a very ambitious notion of world order. The Millennium Declaration, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000, identified several fundamental values considered to be 'essential to international relations in the twenty-first century' (UN 2000). They include democracy, equal rights, social justice, respect for diversity, sustainable development for managing economic growth, and avoiding threats to peace and security. A new version of such goals is included in the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development, the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) (UN 2018).

In terms of declared ambition, then, the international society has gone from a thin version of world order (respect for state sovereignty and peace among states) to an extremely bold version where world order is achieved only when the good life (with peace, welfare, security, health, and freedom for all) is available to all people (see Figure 12.1). This development of the concept has happened gradually over time but with several important bursts. Before the First World War, world order was mainly based on the principle of state sovereignty. After the fighting in 1914–18, an ambitious attempt was made to produce a more substantial order centred on the League of Nations. Another attempt was made after the Second World War, focusing on the UN. Finally, after the collapse of communism in 1989–91, Western democracies tried to make these liberal ideals come true on a global scale, and UN declarations such as the Millennium Development Goals broached the ambition of raising living standards and



**FIGURE 12.1** Varieties of world order

quality of life for the entire humanity, and of shared global responsibility for achieving these goals.

A final point also needs to be made. At the end of the day, our conclusions depend on our baseline of expectations. For world order as well as for liberal democracy, there has always been some sense of crisis, even in periods which now seem to us high water marks for liberalism, such as the 1990s (Merkel 2010). Because expectations are rising, and because we know more and more about global problems (including climate change, fragile states, and international migration), we might erroneously identify a negative trend over time—or, in a word, paint a too grim picture of the present situation that is mostly an artefact of high expectations. We return to this issue at the end of the chapter.

### 12.3 New Contenders: The Rise of China and the Challenge from Russia

The spectacular economic rise of China is well known. China's share of global GDP stood at 19 per cent in 2019, with the US share at 15 per cent (Statista.com 2020). China has grown faster and longer than any other country in history. Annual double-digit growth rates for almost three decades have lifted more than 600 million people out of poverty. An economically empowered China has even sponsored its own 'sinocentric' version of globalization in the form of the ambitious 'Belt and Road Initiative', the aim of which is to economically connect nearly 70 countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa via massive investments in infrastructure.

China is not the only non-Western country to have made a comeback recently. Under Vladimir Putin, Russia has become increasingly assertive in foreign policy. In recent years, Putin's emphasis has been on brinkmanship in looking after Russian interests in

Ukraine as well as in Syria. Other middle-income countries, such as India and Brazil, have also moved forward economically and are increasingly pushing their interests in world politics. According to scholars such as Amitav Acharya (2018), the result of the rise of these BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) is nothing less than an emerging post-American world order (see also Acharya 2014).

What do the strengthening of China and the resurgence of Russia mean for world order? Most of the debate focuses on the challenge from China, which is probably the most important current issue in IR. Many realists foresee a future conflict, possibly culminating in war, between China and the US. Most categorical is John Mearsheimer (2006), who as early as 2006 issued a warning about 'China's Unpeaceful Rise' (see also Mearsheimer 2010, 2019). According to Mearsheimer's 'offensive realist' perspective (see Chapter 3), China will want to become a regional hegemon in East Asia and is therefore set to clash with the US, the only other regional hegemon, who will want no peers. The US will use '**offshore balancing**' in the areas around China, while China will try to push the US and its allies out of what it perceives as its own backyard in East Asia. We are already seeing skirmishes in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and this is just the beginning.

Similar pessimistic predictions come from what we earlier in the book (see Chapter 3) termed 'rise and fall realism' (Elman 2007). This body of theory predicts that war, or at least large-scale conflict, is the likely consequence of a situation where a new great power, China, rises and challenges the old hegemon, the US—just as it happened 2,400 years ago when the rising power of Athens challenged Sparta and sparked a prolonged conflict, known as the Peloponnesian War, between the two city-states and their respective allies. This insight, which has been termed 'Thucydides's Trap' after the ancient Greek historian who identified it as the cause of the war between Athens and Sparta, has received renewed attention by IR scholars lately (Allison 2017).

However, there are also realists who see less of a danger in the rise of China. According to the logic of 'defensive realists', such as Kenneth Waltz and Steven Walt, China's rise might even create a new stability in the form of a return to the bipolarity that worked well during the Cold War (1948–89). The advice of classical realists such as Morgenthau, Carr, and Kennan would more specifically be to recognize power and changes in the balance of power (Kirshner 2012). It is in the interest of the US to accommodate China as a rising power, and it is in the interest of China to avoid unduly provoking the US. With direct reference to the warnings of rise and fall realism, Chinese President Xi Jinping has emphasized that '[w]e all need to work together to avoid the Thucydides trap—destructive tensions between an emerging power and established powers' (Whyte 2005).

Liberals can generally also be placed in the optimist camp, although some are worried because China is an authoritarian power. Most liberal theorists emphasize factors that should make China's rise peaceful. Liberal institutionalists notice how China increasingly participates in international institutions, many of which now have Beijing as an active and valuable member. Given that China and the US have common interests in upholding the present capitalist international order—from which both benefit massively in economic terms—these institutions should mitigate both political and economic conflicts between the two countries. This ameliorative effect is undergirded by the

high level of economic interdependence that we find nowadays, webs of interdependence that cover not only the advanced capitalist democracies but also China and many other middle-income countries (Ikenberry 2018).

Scholars working in the International Society tradition take a different approach to the debate about the rise of China. Their vantage point is Hedley Bull's (1977) twin notions of international society and responsible great powers (see also Foot 2010: 23). According to Bull,

great powers are powers recognised by others to have, and conceived by their own leaders and peoples to have, certain special rights and duties ... They accept the duty, and are thought by others to have the duty, of modifying their policies in the light of the managerial responsibilities they bear.

**Bull (1977: 196)**

There has been a major debate within the international society tradition on whether China acts as a responsible stakeholder of the global international society, and thus as a responsible great power (e.g., Patrick 2010; Foot 2013, 2020). The verdict is still out but there seems to be agreement that China has at least become a much *more* responsible player in international relations since opening up to the world in the early 1980s. The Maoist revolutionism of the decades after the Second World War, a period that saw the 'Cultural Revolution' and the misnamed 'Great Leap Forward', has been replaced by a pragmatic attitude towards other countries, other political systems, and international economic relations in particular (Foot 2013: 37). In 2001, China became a member of the WTO; as we noted earlier, it has generally stepped up its involvement in international institutions.

However, scholars of the International Society approach have also emphasized that we might be heading towards a situation where the rise of China 'stretches' the global international society so that it becomes rather 'thin'; that is to say, there will be cooperation, but it will be less intensive and less demanding. Nested within this thin overarching order, there will be thicker regional orders, including possibly one forming around China in East Asia (Buzan 2014; Acharya, Estevaordal, and Goodman 2019).

To better grasp these developments, we need to take a closer look at domestic developments in China. There is a general consensus that China is at the end of the 'hyper-growth' phase. Export growth cannot continue at previous levels; the extremely high investment rate (of nearly 50 per cent of GDP) cannot continue either (Holz 2017), and the supply of cheap labour is declining. Another fundamental downside of the Chinese model is environmental degradation. According to one 2015 report, breathing Beijing air caused as much damage as smoking forty cigarettes a day (Ferris 2015). More than 70 per cent of China's rivers and lakes are polluted according to government reports, and access to clean water is a major problem both in the cities and the countryside (Xu 2014). Even considering current reforms, China will remain heavily reliant on coal at least until 2030.

China faces other problems. Corruption is endemic in the current Chinese version of bureaucratic capitalism. China ranks 87th in the 2018 Corruption Perception Index, on a par with Swaziland and Indonesia (CPI 2018). A serious effort to eradicate corruption

would require substantial strengthening of the independence of the courts, a much more independent role for the media and a readiness by the Communist Party to accept supervision from the outside; none of that is on the cards. At the same time, the Chinese model contains a balance between state and civil society which rests on control and coercion; that situation is inherently unstable and also ineffective. Spending on domestic security has more than tripled in recent years and now exceeds what China spends on external defence (Tan 2018). Finally, while many Chinese have benefited from three decades of extraordinary economic growth, this has also sent levels of socioeconomic inequality soaring. In sum, the domestic scene will compel China to look inwards, towards its own problems, for a considerable period of time. It will surely look after its regional and global interests, but China will not be a leading player in the construction of world order (Sørensen 2016: 43–52).

As for Russia, it has long since been an integrated member of international society. It is, on paper, the richest of the BRICS, with a per capita GDP of \$13,310 in 2019 (IMF 2019). But Russia's wealth is comprehensively dependent on oil and gas, which provide 70 per cent of export earnings and 50 per cent of state revenues. Several years of high energy prices have provided little incentive for reforms to create a broader economic foundation. Vladimir Putin's rule is based on an alliance with the economic elite headed by the oligarchs. It is a patron-client system characterized by endemic corruption (138th in the Corruption Perception Index). A combination of repression and systematic weakening of public institutions has further undermined the state under Putin's reign (Trudolyubov 2017).

In power terms, Russia cannot take on the West, and the economic consequences of doing so would be disastrous for the country. Nevertheless, Russia is strong enough to assert its influence in the neighbouring countries Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, as well as in the Caucasus and parts of Central Asia. It is Putin's view that Russia has legitimate special security interests in this 'intermediary zone', or its 'near abroad' as it is known to Russian foreign policy hawks, in the same way the United States has had special interests in Latin America since the Monroe doctrine of 1823. Westernization of the zone is seen as a policy of containment and thus a threat to Russian security (Götz 2013; Zubok 2013).

Finally, there is a very substantial reason that the rise of China and reassertion of Russian power need not produce war. As described in detail in Chapter 3, 'mutual assured destruction' (MAD) caused by the nuclear weapon arsenals of e.g. Beijing, Moscow, and Washington mean that great power war equals suicide, even for the initiating party. This is probably a major reason why we have not seen such wars—except by proxy in Korea (1950–53), Vietnam (1955–75), and Afghanistan (1979–89)—for seventy-five years. We must also take into consideration the normative changes that have taken place since the Second World War. As constructivists have compellingly argued, the seventy-five years since the terrible bombings of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have seen the development of a very strong norm against the use of nuclear weapons. The best evidence of this is the reluctance to use nuclear weapons even in situations where a state has no reason to fear nuclear retaliation because the other side does not have the bomb. This 'nuclear taboo' reflects how norms and conventions increasingly affect—and often bind or circumscribe—military capabilities, and this further explains why nuclear weapons have become a stabilizer of international relations rather than the opposite (Tannenwald 1999; Box 12.3).

**BOX 12.3** Key Arguments: The nuclear taboo

... these patterns cannot be accounted for without taking into account the development of a normative prohibition against nuclear weapons. This norm is essential to explaining why nuclear weapons have remained unused and to accounting for their special status as 'taboo' weapons. Its effect has been to delegitimize nuclear weapons as weapons of war and to embed deterrence practices in a set of norms (regulatory and constitutive) that stabilize and restrain the self-help behavior of states.

**Tannenwald (1999: 434)**

## 12.4 New Challenges in Old Democracies

The attack on the liberal world order comes not only from authoritarian governments in China and Russia; it also comes from disgruntled voters and social movements within the old democracies (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2020). Established democracies confront a number of new problems. Economics first: By the early 1980s, a new, neoliberal consensus emerged, spearheaded by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. It sought to promote an open world economy, to reduce barriers to trade and capital flows, and to promote the internationalization of production. Further, a new financial orthodoxy emphasized control of inflation, tax reductions, and deregulation, i.e., a reduced role for the state in the economy (Cerny 2010: 140–56). These principles led to a new phase of intensified economic growth and globalization. This process created winners and losers; winners are those able to capture the benefits of globalization. They tend to be the well-educated elites, owners, managers, professional staff of public and private companies and institutions. The losers are those who suffer the downsides of globalization in terms of unemployment, more limited opportunities, reduced incomes, and marginalization (Cerny 2010: 174).

The result has been less economic and less political cohesion in the established democracies. The previously well-situated middle class is under attack both from above and below. A small group of rich or super-rich continue to increase their share of income and wealth. Technological change reduces the amount of low-skilled middle-class jobs; coupled with outsourcing and the competition from legal and illegal migration, the pressure on the middle-class has increased. Samuel Huntington has argued that what he calls the 'Hispanic Challenge' is a danger to US socio-cultural cohesion because it threatens to turn the United States into 'a country of two languages and two cultures' (Huntington 2004: 45). In Europe, nationalistic movements which stress a very exclusive definition of national identity have emerged. Examples are the Front National in France, the UK Independence Party in Britain, and the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany. At the same time, we have witnessed an important wave of transnational activism centred on expanding and further realizing liberal rights so that they apply with equal force to hitherto marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities and the LGBT+ community. A good example of this is the 'Black Lives Matter' social movement

that began in 2013 and which has sparked large-scale social protests around the globe in recent years.

We must also consider some of the neo-Marxist warnings about the destabilizing consequences of uneven development, even in Western democracies. As described in Chapter 6, Justin Rosenberg has recently connected uneven development to Brexit and to the populist support for Donald Trump in the US (Rosenberg and Boyle 2019; see also McNamara and Newman 2020: E67).

A further consequence is an increased gulf between citizens on the one hand and established elites and established liberal institutions on the other hand. In 1964, for example, 76 per cent of Americans agreed with the statement, 'You can trust the government in Washington to do what is right just about always or most of the time'; by 2019, this had dropped to 17 per cent (Pew Research Center 2019).

In the European Union, there is also a process of increasing political polarization, emphasized by the financial crisis and the migration crisis in 2015. As regards the economy, focus has been on short-term stabilization of debt-ridden countries via austerity measures. At least up until the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union appeared very keen on bailing out banks but not very interested in bailing out ordinary people. The task of effectively confronting the migration crisis has proved exceedingly complex. Some of the countries hardest hit by economic problems are simultaneously burdened by significant migration problems (Greece and Italy). The COVID-19 pandemic crisis arrived as an extra burden, which, at the time of writing, threatens to bankrupt countries such as Italy and Spain unless the EU provides massive economic support. The EU put together an \$857 billion package in July 2020, but this might not be enough.

Nevertheless, there has been a swing towards EU-scepticism brought about by economic crisis with high unemployment, the pressures of migration, and the process of Brexit. The overarching dilemma is this: on the one hand, it is widely acknowledged that there is a need for closer cooperation, for 'more Europe' in order to face a number of severe, border-crossing challenges, including climate change, economic downturn, migration and 'pop-up' crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, European leaders face sceptical citizens, national parliaments, and national courts. Integration is necessary, but it appears very difficult to achieve at the present time (Sørensen 2016; see also Dworkin and Leonard 2018).

In the US, President Trump did not handle the COVID-19 crisis well, and the expensive healthcare system (17 per cent of GNP) was not able to deal effectively with the disease. As a result, there was both a very large number of casualties and a sharp downturn of the economy, with increasing unemployment and massive social problems. In the context of the presidential election in November 2020, it became clear that a massive group of Trump supporters subscribed to a different version of reality than the one documented by the election results. Trump would not yield and clearly encouraged the attack on Congress on 6 January 2021 (Reston and Liptak 2021). Both economic and political divides have reached a new level in the United States.

Under current conditions, then, world order is not able to provide for the good life for large sections of the populations, even in the established liberal democracies. There is regional, and also global, governance, but it falls far short of what is required to control and regulate an increasing number of transnational problems. Neoliberal globalization

continues unabated; there are no strong tendencies towards reigning it in and bringing it under democratic control. That is perhaps because it is not so easy to provide nationally adapted versions of such a modified globalization that would better address the downsides of the current model and also avoid a problematic return to simple national protectionism. First and foremost, it is because dominant political coalitions in the established liberal democracies are not looking in that direction for their preferred solutions.

Liberals and realists agree that the liberal model is under pressure (see Chapter 4). Most liberals think that there is a path forward for a reformed liberal order (e.g., Colgan and Keohane 2017; Ikenberry 2020). Many realists (e.g., Mearsheimer 2019) find that liberal troubles, together with the rise of China, spell the end of any ambition for a liberal order with global reach.

## 12.5 Fragile States in the Global South

The problems that we find in established Western democracies pale in comparison with those we observe in many countries in the Global South. These states have a history of state formation which is radically different from that of the consolidated states in the Global North (see Table 12.1). Their history is one of external domination, most often in the form of colonialism (Brock et al. 2011). Colonial administrators set up authoritarian forms of governance playing a game of ‘divide-and-rule’ that sharpened divisions among domestic groups. Since independence, some states in the Global South have experienced impressive economic growth and democratization; others have stagnated both economically and politically. We have written earlier about the successful ‘Tigers’ in East Asia, and other countries, such as Vietnam and Malaysia in South-East Asia,

TABLE 12.1 Most and least fragile states in the world in 2020

**MOST FRAGILE STATES (TOP 10)**

Yemen	Central African Republic
Somalia	Chad
South Sudan	Sudan
Syria	Afghanistan
Democratic Republic of Congo	Zimbabwe

**LEAST FRAGILE STATES (BOTTOM 10)**

Finland	New Zealand
Norway	Sweden
Switzerland	Canada
Denmark	Luxembourg
Iceland	Australia

Note: Data from the fragile states index (<https://fragilestatesindex.org/data/>). Source: Fund for Peace.



Chile and Uruguay in Latin America, or Botswana in Africa south of the Sahara, can be added to the list. But here, we concentrate on the latter group, which is where we find the problem of fragile states (see also Chapter 1).

Many of these countries have, since independence, been characterized by elite rule based on patron-client relationships to the benefit of the state elites and their allies (Jackson and Rosberg 1982). The link to domestic violent conflict is simple: patron-client relationships favour certain ethnic groups over others; access to material and other benefits becomes connected to ethnic (or ethno-religious) identity, both for insiders and for outsiders. The most intense conflicts concern 'the contention for state power among communal groups', as noted by Ted Gurr (1994: 364) almost three decades ago. In other words, domestic violent conflict in fragile states is not a recent development; it has been a serious problem since the wave of decolonization around 1960 (see also Herbst 2000; Centeno 2003).

During the Cold War, there was a reluctance to intervene in fragile states; the ideology of anti-colonialism was strong in the North, and the newly independent states could argue their case for sovereignty in the UN system and play on the competition between East and West in the Cold War. A good illustration of these dynamics can be found in research into the effects of the Cold War geopolitical rivalry on democracy and democratization. Dunning (2004) shows how geopolitical considerations meant that foreign aid did not help promote democracy during the Cold War; Boix (2011) finds similar results for economic modernization.

The UN *Agenda for Peace* of 1992 opened the door to international involvement in peace-making and peacebuilding. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 then added a national security concern to the focus on fragile states because many such states harbour international terrorists. However, national security concerns and humanitarian concerns seldom overlap. In general, the security factor has not helped strengthen the humanitarian factor (Jentleson 2007: 284). In spite of some UN peacekeeping successes, armed interventions in many cases, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, have not been a success. They have led to long-drawn-out conflicts that threaten to last decades. Why is 'fixing failed states' (Ghani and Lockhart 2009) so complicated?

First, interventions take place under adverse conditions that involve high human and material cost. For example, eighteen years of war in Afghanistan have cost the US more than \$2 trillion (Almukhtar and Nordland 2019). There is a natural hesitancy against rapid and heavy commitments and that creates a 'too little, too late' problem, especially in cases where Western security interests are peripheral, such as Rwanda, Somalia, and Sudan (Sørensen 2016: 101–10).

Second, there is a delicate relationship between insiders and outsiders. Outsiders must eventually go home; insiders must be the drivers of lasting change. Local elites do not represent 'the people' because socio-political cohesion is lacking; any nation-building process is in the early stages. In short, outsiders face local elites who may formally accept or at least pay lip-service to their agendas for building democracy and effective institutions, but their substantial interests are quite different: they want to survive, strengthen their power base, and maximize their control of public resources.

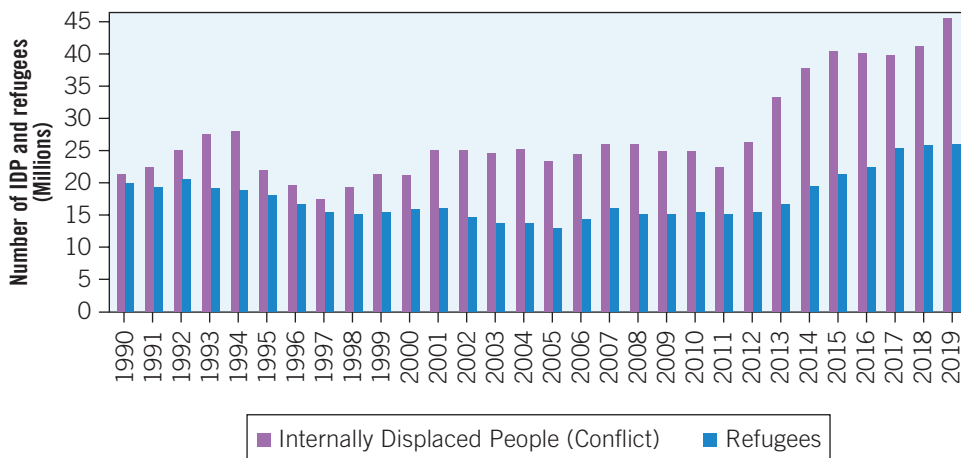
Third, it cannot be assumed that national elites represent the interests of the population. Outsiders ought to focus on the people on the ground, but in many cases the



security situation is not sufficiently stabilized to carry out local projects. Further, a genuine ‘bottom-up’ project can only emerge from a consensus among local constituencies. But locals might not want to live according to the liberal principles brought in by outsiders. There is a potentially sharp conflict between local norms and international (liberal) norms. There is a growing literature on the many problems that outsiders confront in the pursuit of peace, democracy and effective statehood. Afghanistan is a case in point, but there are several additional examples from Africa and Latin America (Hancock and Mitchell 2018; Sørensen 2016). The dangers of outside meddling can be appreciated by invoking the postcolonial perspective introduced in Chapter 8. By describing the Global South as a place of instability and fragility which calls for intervention, liberals risk perpetuating uneven power structures inherited from an imperialist past. There is a delicate balance between trying to help and making things worse that—in hindsight—Western democracies have had a hard time finding (Greene 2017).

There are probably no magic blueprints for conducting intervention. Western undertakings have certainly saved lives, but too often they have failed to ‘win the peace’ in terms of successful peace-, state-, and nation-building. This is closely connected to the adverse conditions in the countries in question, but also to the inherent limitations of intervention. Comprehensive violent conflict will continue in many fragile states for the foreseeable future, accompanied by masses of displaced persons and refugees (Koser 2016; see Figure 12.2). International terrorism has several sources, but one of them is the continuing high level of conflict inside fragile states. Fragile states will be a problem for world order for some considerable time.

**FIGURE 12.2** Internally displaced people and refugees, 1990–2019



Note: Internal displacement refers to the forced movement of people within the country they live in. Only displacement due to conflict or violence is included here. At the end of 2019, 50.8 million people were living in internal displacement because of conflict, violence, and disasters (IDMC 2019). Based on data from IDMC (2019), UNHCR (2019), and UNRWA (2019) (CC BY 3.0). Available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>.

Liberals used to be optimists as regards the prospects for liberal democracy on a global scale; realists were always more sceptical, and many liberals have moved in that direction too (Diamond, Plattner, and Walker 2016; Lind and Wohlforth 2019).

## 12.6 International Institutions: Governance or Gridlock?

Global governance has surely expanded significantly over recent decades. This includes the growth in *interstate* relations, in particular through cooperation in international organizations (IGOs). There were 123 IGOs in 1951; today the number is close to 8,000 (UIA 2013). Another important development is the expansion of *transgovernmental* relations among all kinds of national regulators, e.g., the officials responsible for corporate supervision, environmental standards, antitrust policies, and so on. Finally, *transnational* relations, that is, cross-border relations between individuals, groups, and organizations from civil society, should be noted. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) are active in the regulation of trade, the environment, human rights, etc. In sum, there has been a movement away from traditional territorial government by states towards global governance where national administrations are increasingly involved in complex networks of international cooperation.

Nobody argues that this system of global governance is perfect; the question is whether it can be considered ‘good enough governance’ (Patrick 2014), or whether it is an entirely insufficient case of gridlock—‘a specific set of conditions and mechanisms that impede global cooperation in the present day’ (Hale, Held, and Young 2013: 3). The optimists have a point: a great amount of governance is surely taking place. The immediate problems of the financial crisis were successfully handled by reasonably effective crisis management (Drezner 2012). A large and diversified climate-change regime has taken several initiatives to combat global warming (Kinley 2017; see Chapter 11). The complex security challenges posed by fragile states have been responded to by an ambitious ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P) regime (de Feyter 2017; see Chapter 5). An international refugee regime has been created around the 1951 Refugee Convention and is overseen

### BOX 12.4 Key Developments: The growth of the UNHCR

Gil Loescher’s book *The UNHCR and World Politics* provides a fascinating overview of how the UNHCR and the international refugee regime have evolved. He described how in 1951, when he was appointed the first United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart ‘found three empty rooms and a secretary’, was given a narrow mandate that was expected to last for only three years, and had control over virtually no funds. In 2015, in contrast, Antonio Guterres, the tenth High Commissioner, is in control of an agency with an annual budget of over US\$7 billion, a staff of around 6,000 and a mandate that arguably makes UNHCR the leading humanitarian organization in the world.

**Koser (2016: 66)**

by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) (see Box 12.4). At the same time, emerging powers are increasingly integrated into the institutional structure of global governance.

Sceptics remain unconvinced by this record. What governance there is amounts to merely inconsistent and fragmented short-termism which provides nothing more than frail crisis management, with the next crisis always looming around the corner. Look at the four areas mentioned above: in the financial system, short-term crisis management in relation to the 2008-meltdown may have been relatively successful, but the substantial measures aimed at reforming the system so as to avoid future breakdowns have been relatively weak. The multilateral apparatus plays only a limited role because it has too little political clout and administrative capacity (Hale, Held, and Young 2013; Kapoor 2010).

As for climate change, the current regime will not be able to keep global warming below two degrees Celsius, the monitoring and enforcement mechanisms are weak, and there is no adequate financing in place (Ediboglu 2018). Concerning fragile states and security, a framework for responding to severe humanitarian crises is in place, but it has not been able to formulate and implement effective responses. Discord in the UN Security Council, financial and personnel constraints, and lack of conflict prevention measures are among the major problems (Sørensen 2016: 167–71). Finally, the UN refugee regime is burdened by a historically high number of refugees, increasing unwillingness in Western democracies to take in even genuine refugees, and a growing mismatch between the 1951 convention's concept of political persecution and the reality that most refugees today flee violence and insecurity, not persecution (Koser 2016: 68–9; see Figure 12.2).

By 2020, we were in the middle of the next, major global crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. So far, little indicates that the pandemic will have a transformative effect on international relations (Drezner 2020; Box 12.5). But it comes as no surprise that crisis responses have been overwhelmingly national, with little coordination and cooperation across borders. The crisis confirms that it is still sovereign states that provide the major safeguard of their citizens, not institutions of global governance, nor even regional

#### **BOX 12.5** Key Arguments: COVID-19 as a game changer in international relations?

In the far past, pandemics transformed international politics. In the recent past, the effect of infectious diseases has been more muted. I argue that while the aftershocks of COVID-19 will be real, the pandemic's lasting effects may be minimal. If one examines the distribution of power and the distribution of interests, the effect of COVID-19 has been to mildly reinforce the status quo. It has revealed the sources of Chinese and US power without undercutting the foundations of either one. The pandemic has highlighted the nationalist and protectionist tendencies in both great powers. In neither dimension, however, has COVID-19 had a transformational effect. By historical standards, a minor pandemic will have minimal system-altering effects.

**Drezner (2020: 14)**

governance institutions such as the EU. There is a current system of global governance, but it is not very strong; and the leading states, who should be expected to take on major responsibility for the system, are looking inward, towards their own problems.

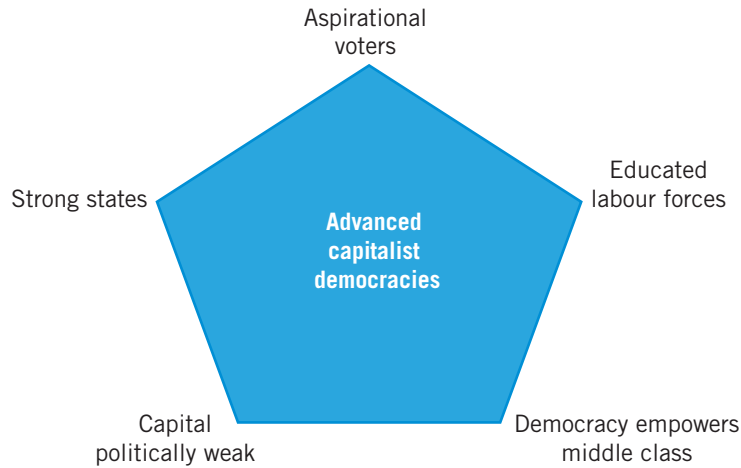
## 12.7 Room for Optimism after All? The Interwar Analogy and the Problem of the Half-filled Glass

So, there is plenty to worry about for students of international relations. But as we pointed out in the beginning of the chapter, this very diagnosis is made against a certain baseline of expectations. Perhaps the best illustration of how the vantage point matters for the conclusion about the present state of the world is how a number of pundits, observers, and scholars have recently warned that we might see a repeat of some of the domestic and international political developments we associate with the darkest era of modern history: the period between the two world wars. This debate tells us much about current anxieties about globalization and the liberal world order, but it also serves as a way of tempering some of today's pessimism.

There is nothing new in fearing that we might see a return to interwar political circumstances; ever since the Second World War, the ghost of the 1930s has haunted the imagination of the western mind. However, these warnings have become very prominent in recent years. A flurry of books, some of which have become international best-sellers, testify to this. They include Timothy Snyder's (2017) *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt's (2018) *How Democracies Die*, Madeleine Albright's (2018) *Fascism: A Warning*, and Cass Sunstein's (2018) anthology *Can It Happen Here? Authoritarianism in America*.

These books have two things in common. First, they argue that modern liberal democracy is in crisis (see also Runciman 2018). Second, they point out that the interwar period shows that even consolidated democracies are vulnerable in the face of economic, social, and political crises. Contemporary western democracies might therefore not be able to cope with challenges such as the rise of populism and economic downturn.

The warning voices have also touched upon the international aspects of the current crises. The interwar analogy is disheartening in this respect, too. The 1930s saw protectionism, dwindling international trade and investment, and a breakdown of the liberal order that the victors of the First World War had attempted to create in 1919–20 (see Chapter 10). These external influences did much to undermine democracies in both Europe and Latin America, especially in the 1930s. Harvard economist Dani Rodrik (2018) argues that it was the 'first wave' of globalization before 1914 which created the severe political backlash that empowered radicalized and populist parties in large parts of interwar Europe and interwar Latin America. The present 'second wave' of globalization, which began in the 1970s and has engulfed almost the entire world in recent decades (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 10) might well, Rodrik warns, produce a similar political backlash against liberal democracy, liberal economics, and the liberal world order. Just like the first wave of globalization, it threatens to do so because it increases inequality (Piketty 2014), and because it creates bifurcated economies where large segments of the population are left behind.

**FIGURE 12.3** Iversen and Soskice's theoretical framework

However, other recent scholarship has pushed back. According to Torben Iversen and David Soskice (2019), it is actually democratic politics and not economics that is driving the current wave of globalization. What Iversen and Soskice term 'advanced capitalist democracies' are not only being strengthened by the current wave of globalization, they are themselves the main sponsors of this wave. Iversen and Soskice identify five factors or reasons which explain why liberal democracy and advanced capitalism are mutually supportive.

Figure 12.3 simplifies Iversen and Soskice's somewhat cumbersome terms in order to bring out how advanced capitalist democracies simultaneously benefit from and are in charge of globalization. The main argument is that in the context of the modern knowledge economy, high state capacity is needed to create an educated workforce, high levels of research and development (R&D), and innovation-friendly corporate milieus. Once these things are in place, conditions are attractive for high-tech corporations, because they are dependent on skills, and because they need to situate themselves in larger clusters of innovation such as Silicon Valley (see also Steger 2017: 67). It is companies that chase skills—and in that sense are captive of state power—not the other way around.

Another recent pushback against the Western pessimism comes from Cornell et al. (2020). They ask what explains the remarkable democratic resilience of the 'old' democracies of north-western Europe, North America, and Oceania. They find the answer in a set of mutually supportive factors, including a long experience with democracy, strong parties, and a vibrant civil society. Their analysis of regime change in the interwar period shows two things. First, that the democratic breakdowns in Continental Europe and Latin America in the 1920s and 1930s are what we would expect based on a large body of research into democratic stability. These breakdowns mainly took place in agrarian economies with weak parties and weak civil societies. Factor in the mutually reinforcing crises of the 1920s and 1930s, and it becomes easy to explain why these new and fragile democracies did not survive.

Second, Cornell et al. show that the 'old' democracies in north-western Europe (Scandinavia, the British Isles, the Low Countries, France, and Switzerland) and in the former

British settler colonies (the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) were able to cope with the interwar crisis without it seriously destabilizing democracy. The few partial exceptions to these patterns, such as Weimar Germany, Austria, and Italy, were so deeply affected by the First World War, the spectre of communism and the ensuing crises of the interwar period that even here the breakdowns are unsurprising (see also Weyland 2021).

Cornell et al. therefore conclude that the interwar period shows just how stable modern representative democracy is when it has had time to consolidate. If we learn anything from revisiting this period, it is that even severe crises pose limited dangers to these kinds of democracies. On this basis, there is room for much more optimism about the potential for today's democracies, especially in modernized countries with long democratic legacies, vibrant civil societies, and modern mass parties. At the same time, established democracies are being challenged in new ways today, as evidenced by Brexit in the United Kingdom and the Trump presidency in the United States.

The Brexit vote in 2016 has been marshalled as evidence of the problems with populism that many Western liberal democracies currently face. It has also been seen as evidence that the old parties are unable to cope with new popular distrust of elites created by globalization. There is some truth to this in the sense that the British political establishment suffered a clear defeat in the Brexit plebiscite. But since then, the British political system has proved quite resilient. The general election in December 2019 showed that British voters have not abandoned the old parties or the parliamentary channel. Turnout was very high, and the party of the establishment par excellence, the Tories under Boris Johnson, were able to tap the votes of the majority which had voted for Brexit, though at the risk of permanently aligning themselves with the declining segment of older and more rural voters at the expense of the growing segment of younger, urban, and well-educated ones.

In the US, the Trump supporters who attacked Congress in early 2021, clearly urged on by their President, were seen by many as a new low point for American democracy. But the assault took place while Congress was certifying Trump's loss of the presidency. Democrats not only won the White House; they also won control of Congress. Such a double loss for Republicans had not taken place since 1892. This can be called a victory for democracy; but the victorious Democrats now face a clear challenge: they must successfully address the deep economic and political polarization of American society (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

The debate about the 'Interwar Analogy' illustrates a more general point: the same empirical evidence can be interpreted in very different ways based on the vantage point. One way of understanding this is via the old metaphor of the glass that is at the same time half-full and half-empty. All participants in the debate reviewed in this section recognize that liberal democracies and the market-based international economy are facing new challenges, and that these sometimes take the form of actual crises. But whereas the pessimists hark back to the interwar period to find examples of how such crises have previously wreaked havoc on democracies and international economic relations, the optimists note that these developments took place in new and fledgling democracies: the old and established—advanced capitalist—democracies have proved remarkably resilient in the face of the turbulence of the twentieth century.

## 12.8 Conclusion

Where are we, then, in terms of world order or world chaos? We began with the examination of prominent contenders for challenging a liberal world order: China and Russia. China has seen a spectacular economic rise, but it also faces severe domestic problems that compel it to look inward. Further, China needs integration into the current order for the purpose of pursuing its economic and political goals. The country is in the process of becoming a more active global player, but on most issues it remains on the sidelines, looking after its own interests. China will not seek violent conflict or even attempt to overturn the existing order. Nor will it pick up a leadership role or make large contributions towards a more effective and legitimate order. China remains ‘internally oriented, self-preoccupied, pursuing a largely narrow self-interested foreign policy’ (Shambaugh 2013).

Russia is well integrated into international society. Under Putin, it has sought opportunistic foreign policy exploits in its near abroad (Ukraine) and in the Middle East (Syria) for the dual purpose of improving Russia’s position internationally and Putin’s position at home. The relationship between Russia and the West has cooled significantly, but violent conflict is not on the cards, not even a new Cold War. At the same time, there is little to expect from Russia in terms of improving the existing order.

We turn to the established liberal democracies. On the one hand, they are clearly among the main beneficiaries of globalization. On the other hand, Western democracies have had to face more specific downsides of globalization, which have harmed social, political, and economic cohesion at home. Economic inequality is high and increasing, a gulf between established elites and large parts of the people has opened to populist politics and bifurcated political systems. The political systems in the liberal heartlands are working, but they are under increased stress from fragmentation and gridlock; economic globalization presents another major challenge to a democratic regime form which was always designed for the nation-state (Held 2007). In several countries, including the United States, this has brought forward political leaders who are primarily concerned about national interests and less concerned with global governance and world order. The liberal world order is therefore finding itself between a rock and a hard place: caught between an attack from the inside (disgruntled voters and populist politicians) and from the outside (rising authoritarian powers) (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2020).

Meanwhile, many fragile states in the Global South have been increasingly plagued by domestic conflict. The end of the Cold War provided an opportunity for Western democracies to ‘fix failed states’ and promote order, peace, and democracy in these countries. The West was also animated by the problem of international terrorism, much of which emerged from fragile states. But after many years, the lesson is clear: there is little outsiders can do when domestic groups, elites as well as people, are unwilling or unable to play along. Liberal democracy and market economies cannot be grafted onto developing countries from the outside—they must be pushed by domestic reform coalitions such as those that have allowed a handful of East Asian countries to join the advanced capitalist democracies in recent generations, and which have propelled other countries in the Global South—such as Chile, Malaysia, and Botswana—towards increased prosperity and democracy. Painful and costly interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere



have dragged on without producing substantial results, and there is a clear danger that Western attempts to intervene and to describe the Global South as a source of instability will be seen as an act of ‘othering’ the non-white world, that is, an ‘us versus them’ thinking where the Global South is considered less worthy of dignity, respect, and equal treatment (see Chapter 8).

The number of international institutions has grown by leaps and bounds, but the system is also weak in several respects. Perhaps the largest problem is that no one is both willing and able to be a driving force for effective and legitimate global governance. The United States has turned away from international institutions under Donald Trump, and it already began turning inward under Barack Obama, who allegedly summarized his own foreign policy doctrine as ‘don’t do stupid shit’ (Rothkopf 2014). The Biden presidency will be different in rhetorical terms, more urbane and softer, but in substance the difference to Trump might not be that great. No other country, or group of countries, is ready to pick up the mantle. Some put their hopes on a ‘G-plus leadership’, where different actors (states, corporations, institutions, civil society) cooperate at different levels and on different issues, and ‘no one leads in all areas or at all levels’ (Acharya, Estevadeordal, and Goodman 2019). To some extent we already have this: piecemeal governance across a large spectrum of issues and levels. The question is whether that is sufficient to provide solutions that go beyond short-term crisis management.

What we have at the present time is thus a patchwork order based on a shaky liberal foundation. But as we have argued above, this pessimistic conclusion in itself reflects the high expectations created in the 1990s. Since the Second World War, we have seen a spectacular substantial development in the direction of a higher number of better consolidated democracies embedded in mutual norms, massively increased international economic interdependence, and stronger international institutions (see Chapter 4). This is also reflected in the ‘thickness’ of the present world order. Even if reality does not live up to the ideal (itself hardly something that is unique about the present international situation), we are very far from the ‘thin’ world order based primarily on a balance of power that characterized the international system up until the 1918, or the rudderless international situation that characterized the 1930s, after the breakdown of the League of Nations.

The picture that forms is thus one of a world order that is far from chaos, more robust than it often seems based on a snapshot of current troubles, and much ‘thicker’ than anything we know from earlier periods. It is a world order that is largely free of interstate war, both due to the ameliorative impact of international institutions, widely shared democratic norms and institutions, and economic interdependence, and because of the threat of nuclear weapons. It is not likely to break down any time soon, as happened in the 1930s. But it is also a bifurcated world order where many weak states are left behind, where a large part of their populations eke out a precarious existence, often in the shadow of civil disorder and violence, and where political dissatisfaction is growing among large segments of the population in the affluent countries, while authoritarian countries such as China and Russia are attacking liberalism from the outside.

Note how our understanding of world order combines views from several theoretical traditions. It endorses the liberal assessment of cooperation pushed by increased



interdependence and international institutions. It also recognizes the realist view of the importance of new rising powers, and it draws on the realist assessment that 'nuclear weapons have drastically reduced the probability of [a war] being fought by the states that have them' (Waltz 1990: 745). Our analysis likewise acknowledges the constructivist insight that anarchy need not be a condition of imminent war between enemies; it can also be a condition of close cooperation among friends—and even nuclear weapons can be bound by norms of non-proliferation and non-use. We employ the notion of an international society of states put forward by the International Society approach. We share the critique of the downsides of the neoliberal model of development put forward from several theoretical starting points, including Marxist ones. And we agree with post-positivist approaches about the increasing significance of identities and the importance for world order of what significant actors say and do. As a student of IR, you should speculate about the sources and theoretical components of your own view of the present state of international relations.

Finally, illustrating a core theme of this book, the discussion in this chapter shows that we can only understand the issue of world order or world chaos by combining international-level and domestic-level factors. Most of the present challenges cut across borders. The best examples are of course climate change, which is by definition a global problem even if some regions are more vulnerable than others, and international migration, which also necessarily crosses borders. But in a world of high economic interdependence much the same can be said about economic crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic is yet another example of how no country today can duck global problems, although they can try to mitigate them via national responses.

Even if it is sometimes used as a platitude, global problems by definition require global solutions. But to understand the international responses to these problems, we need to take into account domestic factors. Developments inside countries, be they rising great powers such as China, fragile states such as Syria and Afghanistan, or established democracies such as the United States, are of vital importance for world order, because they set the framework and define the agenda of the problems that international society has to confront. Different groups of countries have different interests and different capacities based on domestic political institutions, levels of state capacity, and economic systems. Moreover, the internal failings of many states in the Global South are aggravating the very problems that call for coordinated international responses, including terrorism and international migration.

In conclusion, there are no high-profile alternatives to some kind of liberal world order at the present time, and its underpinnings are stronger than pessimists acknowledge. However, we have argued that the interests of China and Russia do not align with those of Western democracies, and that the latter group of countries, historically the standard-bearers of liberal world order, are finding it increasingly hard to fill that role faced with domestic concerns about the downsides of globalization. There are no straightforward ways of repairing the mounting problems which have accompanied this liberal progress. Two major factors play a role here: coalitions of political actors and better ideas. Emerging reform coalitions can be found in many liberal democracies, but presently they turn inward, towards domestic problems. So good ideas about reforming

the current order are in short supply. Therefore, we should look to political agency, that is, individuals and groups that want to improve the liberal model and change things for the better.

## \* Key points

- In the discipline of IR, the debate about world order or world chaos is primarily going on between liberal optimists and sceptical realists. Liberals point to the processes of cooperation, convergence, more support for shared values, and general progress in an increasingly liberal world. Realists emphasize conflict, divergence, the lack of shared values, and the potential for regress in a context of rivalry and competition. Several other observers, with a variety of theoretical orientations, have also made contributions to the debate.
- It is important to understand that things can be both better and bad at the same time. That is the general background of the perennial discussion about progress or decline.
- Over time, the aspirations for world order have grown much more ambitious. The international society has gone from a thin version of world order (respect for state sovereignty and peace among states) to an extremely bold version where world order is achieved only when the good life (with peace, welfare, security, health, and freedom for all) is available to all people.
- China and Russia are challenging the liberal world order, but they are also integrated in it and they benefit from it. At the same time, both countries face serious domestic problems related to corruption, decreasing growth rates, and environmental issues. They are not in a position to become leading players in the construction of world order, but they do exert a rising regional influence. There is no great or imminent risk of war between the great powers.
- The liberal model is under pressure. There is less economic and less political cohesion in the established democracies. A small group of super-rich continue to increase their share of income and wealth. Technological change, outsourcing, and migration increase the pressure on the middle class. The result is political and social polarization.
- Domestic violent conflict has been a serious problem in fragile states since decolonization. Attempts to 'fix failed states' have not been successful; there are strong limits to what outsiders can do, and there is a danger of othering the non-white world by representing them in this way. Fragile states will continue to be a problem for world order.
- There has been an expansion of global governance, but it is still sovereign states that provide the major safeguard of their citizens. The current system of global governance is not very strong, and the leading liberal states are looking inward, towards their own problems.
- At the present time, we have a patchwork order, based on a shaky liberal foundation. A thorough analysis of this order needs to combine views from several theoretical traditions,

including Realism, Liberalism, Social Constructivism, International Society, IPE, and Post-positivist approaches.

## ? Questions

- Define world order and identify the core issues in the debate about world order.
- Provide the major arguments for the view that things are getting better in the world, and for the view that things are getting worse. What is your own position, and why?
- Are some theories better suited than others when it comes to analysing world order? If you have a pet theory, explain why you prefer it.
- Some observers think that a war between the United States and China is on the cards. Discuss.
- Is the liberal model in very serious economic and political trouble because of the downsides of neoliberal globalization and the rise of populism, or are these merely minor issues?
- Why is it that domestic violent conflict goes on and on in many fragile states? How much can outsiders do about it? Is there a risk of othering the non-white world by even broaching the idea of outside interference to address problems of instability?
- There is more global governance than ever before. Do you consider it a strong or a weak system? Why or why not?
- We tend to expect a lot from a well-functioning world order. How important is our baseline of expectations for our view of world order?

## 📖 Guide to further reading

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Access the online resources to take your learning and understanding further, including review questions, case studies, web links, flashcards, and a database of videos.



[www.oup.com/he/sorensen-moller8e](http://www.oup.com/he/sorensen-moller8e)



# GLOSSARY

**anarchical society** A term used by Hedley Bull to describe the worldwide order of independent states who share common interests and values, and subject themselves to a common set of rules and institutions in dealing with each other. The concept of 'anarchical society' combines the realist claim that no world 'government' rules over sovereign states, with idealism's emphasis on the common concerns, values, rules, institutions, and organizations of the international system.

**Anthropocene** An increasingly influential naming of a geological period where humans have had a significant, and often devastating, impact on ecosystems. Some scholars go so far as to backdate the Anthropocene to the agricultural revolutions that began in the Middle East 12,000 years ago (or even the time hominids first began using fire); but most reserve the term for the period after the Industrial Revolution where humans have started to unleash large-scale emissions of greenhouse gases, and many only date its beginning to the Atomic Age after the Second World War.

**balance of power** By balance of power, scholars normally mean some kind of power equilibrium between states in an international system, manifesting itself in either multipolarity or bipolarity. This situation differs from other possible outcomes, including hegemony or full imperialization. Hegemony means that one state lays down the rules for the others, empire that one state has rolled up the system, either directly by conquering and annexing all other states or indirectly by making them vassals. Balance of power instead implies that states are each other's equals and that they regularly form alliances against would-be hegemons (balancing). According to neorealism, it is almost a historical law that state systems move towards a balance of power.

**behaviouralism** An approach that seeks increasing precision, parsimony, and the predictive and explanatory power of IR theory. Behaviouralists believe in the unity of science: that social science is not fundamentally different from natural science; that the same analytical methods—including quantitative methods—can be applied in both areas. Behaviouralists also believe in interdisciplinary studies among the social sciences.

**Bretton Woods** The system of international economic management, setting the rules for commercial exchange between the world's major industrial states. Allied states set up the system in the New Hampshire resort town of Bretton Woods in July 1944.

**bureaucratic structures and processes approach to foreign policy** A strongly empirical (evidence-

based) sociological approach to foreign policy that focuses primarily on the organizational (or bureaucratic) context in which decision-making takes place. The 'bureaucratic' approach is seen by supporters to be superior to other approaches by virtue of its empirical analysis of the relationship between decision-making and organizational structure. This approach, therefore, emphasizes specific context over the inherent rationality of any foreign policy decision; it seeks to clarify the context-based reasons for individual foreign policies, but does not have a strong normative, prescriptive component.

**classical realism** A theory of IR associated with thinkers such as Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Thomas Hobbes. They believe that the goal, the means, and the uses of power are central preoccupations of international relations, which is an arena of continuous rivalry and potential or actual conflict between states that are obliged to pursue the goals of security and survival. In comparison with neorealism, which largely ignores moral and ethical considerations in IR, classical realism has a strong normative doctrine.

**cognitive processes and psychology approach** Unlike the bureaucratic and other sociological approaches, this approach focuses on the individual decision maker, with particular attention to the psychological aspects of decision making. Robert Jervis has studied misperception, and the construction of erroneous 'images' of others, as it pertains to these state leaders. Margaret Herman studied the personalities of dozens of government leaders, arguing that such factors as experience, political style, and world-view affect the ways leaders conduct their foreign policies.

**communitarianism** A normative doctrine that focuses on political communities, especially nation-states, which are seen as fundamental agents and referents in world politics. According to this position, states' interests come before those of individuals or that of humanity in general.

**comparative approach to foreign policy** A form of policy analysis inspired by the behaviouralist movement in political science. Unlike the traditional approach to foreign policy analysis, in which information is sought about one single country's policy, the comparative approach amasses substantial data about the content and context of many countries' foreign policies. Rather than merely prescribe action for a specific country in a specific context, the goal of the comparative approach is to develop systematic theories and explanations of the foreign policy process in general.

**Copenhagen School** A term coined by a critic (Bill McSweeney) to denote the new approach to non-military aspects of security—a shift away from traditional security

studies—pioneered by scholars such as Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, who were all associated with the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute. The key concept of the School is ‘securitization’ (see entry). The primary work of the School is Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde’s book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, published in 1997.

**cosmopolitanism** A normative doctrine that focuses on individual human beings and the whole of humanity, seen as fundamental agents and referents in world politics, whose needs should come before the interests of states.

**critical theory** A post-positivist approach to IR influenced by Marxist thought advanced by the Frankfurt School. Critical theory rejects three basic postulates of positivism: an objective external reality, the subject/object distinction, and value-free social science. Critical theorists emphasize the fundamentally political nature of knowledge. They seek to liberate humanity from the conservative forces and ‘oppressive’ structures of hegemonic (US-dominated) world politics and global economics. Critical theorists are similar to idealists in their support for progressive change and their employment of theory to help bring about that change.

**defensive realism** According to Kenneth Waltz’s theory, a ‘defensive realist’ recognizes that states seek power for security and survival, but that striving for excessive power is counterproductive because it provokes hostile alliances by other states.

**dependency theory** Draws on classical Marxist analysis, but is different from classical Marxism in one basic respect. Unlike Marx, dependency theorists do not expect capitalist development to take root and unfold in the developing world in the same way that capitalism first took place in Western Europe and North America. The main aim of dependency theory is to critique the dependency form that capitalist development is seen to take in developing countries. In short, dependency theory is an attack on late capitalism. It is an effort to provide the theoretical tools by which developing countries can defend themselves against globalizing capitalism.

**discourse** A system of communication and thought that shapes how the world is perceived. Social theorists emphasize how the vocabulary and expressions we use have an effect on how we perceive reality, because language assigns meaning. For instance, it makes a huge difference whether perpetrators of violence are labelled as freedom fighters, soldiers, non-army combatants, or terrorists. Discourse is therefore also an act of power, a way of defining ‘truth’.

**economic liberalism** Adam Smith (1723–90), the father of economic liberalism, believed that markets tend to expand spontaneously for the satisfaction of human needs—provided that governments do not unduly interfere. He builds on the body of liberal ideas that are summarized in Chapter 4. These core ideas include the rational individual actor, a belief in progress, and an assumption of mutual gain from free exchange. But Smith

also adds to liberal thinking some elements of his own, including the key notion that the economic marketplace is the main source of progress, cooperation, and prosperity. Political interference and state regulation, by contrast, are uneconomical, retrogressive, and can lead to conflict.

**ecoradicals** Believe that environmental problems are highly serious. Dramatic changes of lifestyles plus population control are necessary in order to promote sustainable development.

**emancipatory theory** Seeking to counter realism, emancipatory theorists, such as Ken Booth and Andrew Linklater, argue that IR should seek to understand how men and women are prisoners of the existing state system, and how they can be liberated from the state and from the other oppressive structures of contemporary world politics, which can be reconstructed along universal, solidarist lines.

**empirical statehood** Part of the external basis of a state’s sovereignty is the extent to which a state fulfils its role as a substantial political-economic organization. A successful state in terms of empirical statehood has developed efficient political institutions, a solid economic basis, and a substantial degree of national unity (internal popular support for the state).

**epistemology** The philosophical study of how one comes to ‘know’ something, and what is ultimately ‘knowable’. One position is that the world can be ‘explained’, from outside, by a social-scientific test of empirical propositions. That view is particularly widespread among American IR scholars. The opposite position holds that the world can only be ‘discerned’, ‘comprehended’, and ‘interpreted’, from inside, by historical, legal, and philosophical analysis. While this view is gaining ground in the United States, it remains more likely to be found among British and continental European IR scholars.

**ethics of statecraft** Ensuring national security and state survival is the fundamental responsibility of statecraft and the core normative doctrine of classical realism. The state is considered to be essential for the good life of its citizens. The state is thus seen as a protector of its territory, of the population, and of their distinctive and valued way of life. The national interest is the final arbiter in judging foreign policy.

**eurocentrism** A biased view that favours the Western world or Global North at the expense of the rest of the world. The term became popular in postcolonial and development studies in the 1980s and 1990s to describe how many European or American scholars have ignored or belittled non-Western contributions to e.g., the development of science, technology, and culture and hence have ‘othered’ non-Western areas as insufficient. It is often seen as a tacit or explicit exercise of power—a colonization of history and politics, so to speak—designed to perpetuate the dominance of the Western world.

**failed states** Weak states incapable of creating domestic order. State failure is a case of extreme weakness involving

a more or less complete breakdown of domestic order. Examples are Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia, and Sudan.

**feminism** Emphasizes that women are a disadvantaged group in the world, in both material terms and in terms of a value system that favours men over women. A gender-sensitive perspective on IR investigates the inferior position of women in the international political and economic system, and analyses how our current ways of thinking about IR tend to disguise as well as reproduce a gender hierarchy.

**foreign policy** The manner in which states interact with other states, international organizations, and foreign non-governmental actors (such as NGOs, corporations, and terrorist organizations). Foreign policy thus includes all competitive and cooperative strategies, measures, goals, guidelines, directives, understandings, agreements, etc., through which a state conducts its international relations. By virtue of their separate international existence, all states are obliged to develop and execute foreign policy towards these other states and international organizations. Normally, key policymakers are leading government officials, namely presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, defence ministers, etc. Dealing with everything from the conduct of war to the regulation of imported goods, policymaking tends to involve means–end and cost–benefit analyses of realistic goals and available means to achieve them.

**foreign policy analysis** Involves scrutinizing foreign policies and placing them in a broader context of academic knowledge. There are many approaches to the analysis of foreign policy, with each having different descriptive and prescriptive goals and paying attention to various dimensions (sociological, psychological, historical context, etc.) of the decision-making process. Foreign policy analysis often involves instrumental analysis, studying the best means for reaching an advisable goal; it may also include a prescriptive component; that is, making recommendations for the best course to follow.

**functionalist theory of integration** A theory coined by David Mitrany. He argued that greater interdependence in the form of transnational ties between countries could lead to peace. Mitrany believed, perhaps somewhat naively, that cooperation should be arranged by technical experts, not by politicians. The experts would devise solutions to common problems in various functional areas: transport, communication, finance, etc. Technical and economic collaboration would expand when participants discovered the mutual benefits to be obtained from it. When citizens saw the welfare improvements resulting from efficient collaboration in international organizations, they would transfer their loyalty from the state to international organizations.

**gender issues** The starting point for introducing gender to IR is often the debate about basic inequalities between men and women, and the consequences of such inequalities for world politics. Compared with men,

women are a disadvantaged group in the world. Women own about 1 per cent of the world's property and make up fewer than 5 per cent of heads of state and cabinet ministers. Women put in about 60 per cent of all working hours, but they take home only 10 per cent of all income. Women also account for 60 per cent of all illiterates and, together with their children, about 80 per cent of all refugees.

**Global South** A term used to denote developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere that were colonized or dominated by Western countries. These are distinguished from states in the 'Global North', which include affluent countries in Europe and North America as well as Japan and Australia. The term Global South has been promoted to replace value-laden terms such as the Third World. Recent calls for a truly 'Global IR' emphasize the need to bring in voices on global relations from the Global South and criticize the tendency of traditional IR theories to paint these areas as culturally backward, deficient, and unstable areas, threatening international order through terrorism and migration.

**globalization** Is the spread and intensification of economic, social, and cultural relations across international borders.

**green theory** A branch of critical theory that urges us to free ourselves of the straitjacket of competitive interstate relations by widening the political community within which we seek solutions to environmental problems, and by challenging the way we currently value economic consumption over environmental concerns. Green theory is thus based on putting nature and long-term ecological interests before people and short-term human interests.

**greenhouse effect** The natural process which occurs when gases in the Earth's atmosphere, including carbon dioxide, trap the heat of the sun. The atmosphere and the greenhouse effect are what makes the Earth habitable for human beings. However, increased emissions of carbon dioxide have led to a human-made additional warming of the Earth since the Industrial Revolution. This poses severe threats to both people, plants, and wildlife.

**hegemonic stability theory** A hegemon—a dominant military and economic power—is necessary for the creation and full development of a liberal world market economy, because in the absence of such a power, liberal rules cannot be enforced around the world. That, in its simplest form, is the theory of hegemonic stability, which is indebted to mercantilist thinking about politics being in charge of economics.

**hegemony** In IR, a concept referring to a state's power relative to that of other states. A state may be considered a hegemon if it is so powerful economically and militarily that it is a dominant influence on the domestic and foreign policies of other states. Depending on its level of power, a state may be a regional hegemon (e.g., Germany immediately prior to and during the Second World War)



or a global hegemon (e.g., many argue, the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries).

**ideational view** In the ideational view held by social constructivists, ideas always matter. The material world is indeterminate; it needs to be interpreted. Without ideas there can be no larger context of meaning. Ideas define the meaning of material power.

**imperialism** The projection of power by a political entity for the purpose of territorial expansion and political and economic influence beyond its formal borders. Much of history has been marked by the expansion and demise of empires; the Roman Empire, the Mongol Empire, the British Empire, and the Ottoman Empire, to name but a few. After the Second World War, the last of the great empires were dissolved.

**institutional liberalism** This strand of liberalism picks up on earlier liberal thought about the beneficial effects of international institutions. The earlier liberal vision was one of transforming international relations from a 'jungle' of chaotic power politics to a 'zoo' of regulated and peaceful intercourse. This transformation was to be achieved through the building of international organizations, most importantly the League of Nations. Present-day institutional liberals are less optimistic than their more idealist predecessors. They do agree that international institutions can make cooperation easier and far more likely, but they do not claim that such institutions can by themselves guarantee a qualitative transformation of international relations, from a 'jungle' to a 'zoo'. Powerful states will not easily be completely constrained. However, institutional liberals do not agree with the realist view that international institutions are mere 'scraps of paper', that they are at the complete mercy of powerful states. They are of independent importance, and they can promote cooperation between states.

**interdependence liberalism** A branch of liberal thinking which argues that a high division of labour in the international economy increases interdependence between states, and discourages and reduces violent conflict between states. There still remains a risk that modern states will slide back to the military option and once again enter into arms races and violent confrontations. But that is not a likely prospect. It is in the less developed countries that war now occurs, because at lower levels of economic development land continues to be the dominant factor of production; modernization and interdependence are far weaker.

**international justice** Is, along with international order, a fundamental normative value of the International Society tradition. This approach discerns tendencies towards both communicative justice (as in diplomatic practices) and distributive justice (as in the provision of development aid) in international relations.

**international order** An order between states in a system or society of states. Along with international justice, international order is a fundamental normative value of the International Society tradition. Hedley Bull identifies four goals necessary for international order: preserving international society; upholding the independence of member states; maintaining peace; and adhering to norms governing war, diplomacy, and sovereignty. Responsibility for the pursuit and preservation of international order lies with the great powers, whose fundamental duty, according to Bull, is to maintain the 'balance of power'.

**International Political Economy (IPE)** IPE is about international wealth and international poverty; about who gets what in the international system. If economics is about the pursuit of wealth, and politics about the pursuit of power, the two interact in puzzling and complicated ways. It is this complex interplay in the international context between politics and economics, between states and markets, which is at the core of IPE.

**International Relations (IR)** IR is the shorthand name for the subject of international relations. The traditional core of IR concerns the development and change of sovereign statehood in the context of the larger system or society of states. Contemporary IR not only concerns political relations between states but also a host of other subjects: economic interdependence, human rights, transnational corporations, international organizations, the environment, gender, inequalities, development, terrorism, and so forth.

**International Society School** This approach to IR emphasizes the simultaneous presence in international society of both realist and liberal elements. There is conflict and there is cooperation; there are states and there are individuals. These different elements cannot be simplified and abstracted into a single theory that emphasizes only one aspect—e.g., power. International Society theorists argue for an approach that recognizes the simultaneous presence of all these elements.

**international state of nature** This is a permanent condition of actual or potential war between sovereign states. War is necessary, as a last resort, for resolving disputes between states that cannot agree and will not acquiesce. Human society and morality are confined to the state and do not extend into international relations, which is a political arena of considerable turmoil, discord, and conflict between states in which the great powers dominate everybody else.

**international system** According to Hedley Bull, an international system is formed when states have sufficient contact between them, and sufficient impact on one another's decisions, to make the behaviour of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other.

**Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS)** An acutely violent and barbaric form of terrorism in the Middle

East, but also a better organized, more capable and more determined form, that aspired to be an Islamic State or Caliphate, and that attempted to destroy and displace Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and other existing states in that region by using the most shocking methods and tactics imaginable.

**judicial statehood** Part of the external basis of a state's sovereignty. A state must be recognized as a formal or legal institution by other states—hence the fact that, for example, Quebec will never be a sovereign state unless Canada, the United States, and others recognize it as such. In addition to sovereignty itself, this dimension of statehood includes the right to membership in international organizations and the possession of various international rights and responsibilities.

**laissez-faire** Is the idea of freedom of the market from all kinds of political restriction and regulation, supported by early economic liberals. Yet, even these liberals were aware of the need for a politically constructed legal framework as a basis for the market. Laissez-faire does not mean the absence of any political regulation whatsoever; it means that the state shall only set up those minimal underpinnings that are necessary for the market to function properly. This is the classical version of economic liberalism. At the present time this view is also put forward under labels such as 'conservatism' or 'neoliberalism'; the content is, however, basically the same. The 'conservative/neoliberal' economic policies of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and of Ronald Reagan in the United States were both based on classical laissez-faire doctrines.

**level-of-analysis approach** Foreign policy theories analysed at three different levels initially conceptualized by Kenneth Waltz: the systemic level involving the distribution of power among states; the nation-state level involving the type of government, the relations between the state and groups in society, and the bureaucratic make-up of the state apparatus; and the level of the individual decision maker, involving his or her way of thinking, basic beliefs, personal priorities, and so forth.

**liberal approach** Foreign policy theorists concerned with multilateral questions are likely to take a liberal approach, emphasizing international institutions—such as the United Nations or the World Trade Organization (WTO)—as a means of reducing international conflict and promoting mutual understanding and common interests.

**liberalism** The liberal tradition in IR emphasizes the great potential for human progress in modern civil society and the capitalist economy, both of which can flourish in states which guarantee individual liberty. The modern liberal state invokes a political and economic system that will bring peace and prosperity. Relations between liberal states will be collaborative and cooperative.

**logic of consequences and logic of appropriateness** These concepts were developed by March and Olson (1989) to distinguish between

a rationalist and a sociological notion of what guides human motivation and behaviour. Those guided by a logic of consequences have clear preferences and calculate the expected payoff of their actions, choosing those that maximize returns. Those guided by a logic of appropriateness instead take their cue from norms and choose the actions that are seen as appropriate in a specific situation or general context.

**Marxism** The political economy of the nineteenth-century German philosopher and economist Karl Marx in many ways represents a fundamental critique of economic liberalism. Economic liberals view the economy as a positive-sum game with benefits for all. Marx rejected that view. Instead, he saw the economy as a site of human exploitation and class inequality. Marx thus takes the zero-sum argument of mercantilism and applies it to relations of classes instead of relations of states. Marxists agree with mercantilists that politics and economics are closely intertwined; both reject the liberal view of an economic sphere operating under its own laws. But where mercantilists see economics as a tool of politics, Marxists put economics first and politics second. For Marxists, the capitalist economy is based on two antagonistic social classes: one class, the bourgeoisie, owns the means of production; the other class, the proletariat, owns only its labour power which it must sell to the bourgeoisie. But labour puts in more work than it gets back in pay; there is a surplus value appropriated by the bourgeoisie. That is capitalist profit and it is derived from labour exploitation.

**materialist view** According to the materialist view, power and national interest are the driving forces in international politics. Power is ultimately military capability, supported by economic and other resources. National interest is the self-regarding desire by states for power, security, or wealth. Power and interest are seen as 'material' factors; they are objective entities in the sense that, because of anarchy, states are compelled to be preoccupied with power and interest. In this view, ideas matter little; they can be used to rationalize actions dictated by material interest.

**mercantilism** The world-view of political elites that were at the forefront of building the modern state. They took the approach that economic activity is and should be subordinated to the primary goal of building a strong state. In other words, economics is a tool of politics, a basis for political power. That is a defining feature of mercantilist thinking. Mercantilists see the international economy as an arena of conflict between opposing national interests, rather than an area of cooperation and mutual gain. In brief, economic competition between states is a 'zero-sum game' where one state's gain is another state's loss.

**methodological pluralism** Describes the notion that there is no one right method for analysing international relations. The main reasoning behind the pluralist stance is that there is no consensus about a criterion for science that can be imported from philosophers of science. In a specific

research situation, the right method is one that aligns the methods with the ontological assumptions about causality. Different scholars will therefore use different methods based on their different understanding of the nature of the social world in general and international relations in particular.

**modernists** Those who believe that environmental challenges are not a serious challenge to advanced societies. Progress in knowledge and technology will enable us to protect the environment.

**modernization theory** A liberal theory of development; the basic idea is that developing countries should be expected to follow the same developmental path taken earlier by the developed countries in the West: a progressive journey from a traditional, pre-industrial, agrarian society towards a modern, industrial, mass-consumption society. Development means overcoming barriers of pre-industrial production, backward institutions, and parochial value systems which impede the process of growth and modernization.

**national security** The policies employed and the actions undertaken by a state to counter real or potential internal and external threats and to ensure the safety of its citizens. This is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the state to its people, and the fundamental state responsibility according to the realist view of IR. Before the advent of the state and the state system, security was provided by family, clan, warlord, or another locally based entity; this responsibility, among others, was gradually transferred to the state.

**neoclassical realism** Seeks to improve upon neorealism by introducing elements that neorealists have left out of their analysis. Neoclassical realists clearly want to retain the structural argument of neorealism. But they also want to add to it the instrumental (policy or strategy) argument of the role of stateleaders on which classical realism places its emphasis and the domestic factors that liberalism focuses on. Anarchy and the relative power of states do not dictate the foreign policies of stateleaders. That is to say, international structure (anarchy and the balance of power) constrains states but it does not ultimately dictate leadership policies and actions. Internal characteristics of states also affect the policy choices made by stateleaders.

**neoliberalism** A renewed liberal approach which seeks to avoid the utopianism of earlier liberalist theory. Neoliberals share classical liberal ideas about the possibility of progress and change, but they repudiate idealism. They also strive to formulate theories and apply new methods which are scientific.

**neorealism** This theory developed by Kenneth Waltz analyses how the decentralized and anarchical structure of the state system, in particular the relative distribution of power of states, more or less determines state actions. International change occurs when great powers rise and fall and the balance of power shifts accordingly. A typical

means of such change is great-power war. Actors are less important because structures compel them to act in certain ways. An ethics of statecraft is thus unnecessary.

**normative theory** Can be viewed as the political theory or moral philosophy that underlies IR. Normative theory is primarily concerned with understanding fundamental values of international life, the moral dimensions of international relations, and the place of ethics in statecraft. Although it focuses on values, rules, practices, and the like, normative theory is not necessarily a prescriptive approach to IR.

**North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** An international defence organization established in 1949 to provide the assured concerted defence of each of its member states. NATO (whose primary member was and is the United States), and the signatories of the Warsaw Pact (whose primary member was the Soviet Union) were the two rivals (though fundamentally the United States and the Soviet Union) in the Cold War and the bipolar world order. NATO outlined the Warsaw Pact and in 2004 accepted seven new members, including six former Warsaw Pact countries.

**offensive realism** A theory developed by John Mearsheimer, in contrast to 'defensive realism'. Great powers, according to this theory, are perpetually seeking ways to gain power over their rivals, towards the ultimate goal of hegemony.

**offshore balancing** Offshore balancing is a concept from realist analysis of power balancing. When great powers shift the burden to regional partners in order to check the rise of potentially hostile rivals, they practise offshore balancing.

**ontology** The philosophical study of the nature (or reality) of the world and its components. Methodological divisions and debates in IR often reflect differing and even contradictory ontologies; e.g., whether an 'objective' world exists outside human experience, or only a 'subjective' world constructed by human experience. The claim that international relations is an external 'thing' or 'object' or 'reality' is associated with behaviouralist and positivist approaches, such as neorealism. The alternative claim that international relations consists of shared human understandings expressed via language, ideas, and concepts is associated with International Society, normative theory, constructivism, and postmodernism.

**pluralism** Along with solidarism, one of two International Society approaches to the potential conflict between state sovereignty and respect for human rights. A pluralist view of the state system emphasizes the primacy of state sovereignty: a policy of non-intervention must be maintained even when another state is experiencing (or complicit in) a humanitarian crisis within its borders. Civil rights (within states) take precedence over human rights (between states).

**positivism** A methodology in IR that employs most of the attitudes and assumptions of behaviouralism but does so

in a more sophisticated way. Positivism is a fundamentally scientific approach. Its advocates and adherents believe that there can be objective knowledge of the social and political dimensions of the world, and that this knowledge is obtainable through the careful development and testing of empirical propositions. The social scientist is no different from any other scientist in this regard.

**postcolonialism** Adopts a post-structural attitude in order to understand the situation in areas that were conquered by Europe; in particular, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. When Western scholars talk about 'traditional' and 'underdeveloped' 'Third World' countries, they are really constructing certain images of these areas which reflect how the powerful dominate and organize the ways in which states in the South are perceived and discussed. Any real liberation of the South thus needs to critically expose such images; only in that way can the road be paved for really democratic and egalitarian relationships.

**postmodern states** Are states with high levels of cross-border integration. The economy is globalized rather than 'national'. The polity is characterized by multilevel governance at the supranational, national, and sub-national level. Collective loyalties are increasingly projected away from the state.

**postmodernism** A post-positivist approach to IR that rejects the modern, Enlightenment idea that ever-expanding human knowledge will lead to an improved understanding and mastery of the international system. A distinctive feature of postmodernist discourse in IR is an inclination towards scepticism, debunking, and deconstruction of 'universal truths'—such as those advanced by Kant or Marx or Waltz—that are supposed to be valid for all times and places.

**post-positivism** A methodology developed largely in reaction to positivist claims. Post-positivism presupposes methods that acknowledge the distinctiveness of human beings as such; i.e., creatures that must live with and among each other in order to lead a human life. Post-positivist methodology rests on the proposition that people conceive, construct, and constitute the worlds in which they live, including the international world, which is an entirely human arrangement and nothing else. Social science is a different methodology from that of natural science.

**post-positivist approaches** Are united by a dissatisfaction with the established theoretical traditions in the discipline, in particular with neorealism. They argue against positivist methodology with its focus on observable facts and measurable data. Post-positivists emphasize that IR theorists (as are all theorists of human affairs) are an integrated part of the world they study. In that sense, theorists are insiders, not outsiders. They make certain assumptions and create certain images of reality; knowledge is not and cannot be neutral. There is no single, final truth out there; there are competing claims about

how the world hangs together and what makes it tick. Three of the most important ones are post-structuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism.

**post-structuralism** Is focused on language and discourse; it adopts a critical attitude towards established approaches in that it highlights the ways in which these theories represent and discuss the world. It is particularly critical of neorealism because of its one-sided focus on (Northern) states. Neorealism presents a world where a variety of actors (e.g., women, the poor, groups in the South, protest movements) and processes (e.g., exploitation, subordination, environmental degradation) are not identified and analysed. Neorealism, therefore, constructs a biased picture of the world that needs to be exposed and criticized.

**public goods** Such goods are characterized by non-excludability; others cannot be denied access to them. The air that we breathe is an example of such a good. A lighthouse is another example of a public good; so is a road or a pavement. The elements of a liberal world economy, such as a currency system for international payments, or the possibility to trade in a free market, are other examples of public goods. Once created, they are there for the benefit of all.

**quasi-state** A state that possesses juridical statehood but is severely deficient in empirical statehood. A large number of states in the developing world can be defined in this way: they are recognized as states and participate in the state system, but they have weak or corrupt political institutions, underdeveloped economies, and little or no national unity.

**Rational Actor Model (RAM)** An approach to foreign policy analysis at the systemic level that views the sovereign state as a unitary actor driven by a motivation to advance its national interests, and which assumes that decisions made by the state are based on rational choice.

**rational choice theory** Neoclassical economics present a simple model of individuals and their basic behaviour. That model—called rational choice theory—is relevant, so the economists claim, not merely for economics, but for every other sphere of human behaviour. Rational choice begins with individuals. Whatever happens in the social world, including in international relations, can be explained by individual choices. What a state or any other organization does can be explained by choices also made by individuals. This view is called methodological individualism. Furthermore, individual actors are rational and self-interested. They want to make themselves better off. This is true for everybody; not merely for sellers and buyers in economic markets, but also for bureaucrats and politicians. Finally, when individuals act in a rational and self-interested way, the overall result or outcome for states or systems will be the best possible. Just as 'the invisible hand' in liberal economics leads from individual greed to the best possible economic result for all, so individual actions by bureaucrats and politicians lead to the best

possible outcomes. So if we want to understand what governments do, our first priority must be to understand the preferences; that is, the goals, of public officials. They will be looking for private benefits: re-election, promotion, prestige, and so on. Once we understand how these preferences condition their behaviour, we are in a position to understand how state policies are affected. That is a basic claim of rational choice theory.

**rationalism** Is one of three interacting philosophies (along with realism and revolutionism) whose dialogue, according to Martin Wight, is essential to an adequate understanding of IR. Rationalists, such as Hugo Grotius, are more optimistic in their view of human nature than are realists. Rationalism conceives of states as legal organizations that operate in accordance with international law and diplomatic practice; international relations are, therefore, norm-governed policies and activities based on the mutually recognized authority of sovereign states.

**realism** The realist tradition in IR is based on: (1) a pessimistic view of human nature—humans are self-interested and egoistic; (2) a conviction that international relations are conflictual and may always lead to war; (3) a high regard for the values of national security and state survival; and (4) a basic scepticism that there can be progress in international politics.

**republican liberalism** This strand of liberalism is built on the claim that liberal democracies are more peaceful and law-abiding than are other political systems. The argument is not that democracies never go to war; democracies have gone to war as often as have non-democracies; but the argument is that democracies do not fight each other. This observation was first articulated by Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century in reference to republican states rather than democracies. It was resurrected by Dean Babst in 1964 and it has been advanced in numerous studies since then.

**responsibility to protect (R2P)** An international norm according to which a state has a responsibility to protect its population from mass atrocities. If it fails to do so, the international community has a responsibility to intervene.

**revolutionism** One of three interacting philosophies (along with realism and rationalism) whose dialogue, according to Wight, is essential to an adequate understanding of IR. Revolutionists, such as Kant and Marx, are solidarists who believe in the 'moral unity' of humankind beyond the state. They hold in common a progressive aim of changing (even eliminating) the international state system in the expectation of creating a better world. Revolutionists are more optimistic than rationalists and realists about human nature: they believe in the achievability of human perfection.

**securitization** The speech act through which state actors transform issues into matters of 'security', understood as a radical form of politization that enables the use of extraordinary measures in the name of 'security'. The

concept has been developed by the Copenhagen School of security studies (see entry).

**security dilemma** An important paradox inherent in the state system. A fundamental reason for the existence of states is to provide their citizens with security from internal and external threats; however, the existence of these armed states threatens the very security they are expected to maintain.

**social constructivism** Constructivists argue that the most important aspect of international relations is social, not material. Furthermore, they argue that this social reality is not objective, or external, to the observer of international affairs. The social and political world, including the world of international relations, is not a physical entity or material object that is outside human consciousness. Consequently, the study of international relations must focus on the ideas and beliefs that inform the actors on the international scene as well as the shared understandings between them.

**social constructivist approach** A theory of foreign policymaking as an intersubjective world, whose ideas and discourse can be scrutinized in order to arrive at a better understanding of the process. The discourse of actors is seen to shape policymaking, since policies are conveyed by speech and writing. Some constructivists claim that identity, rooted in ideas and discourse, is the basis for a definition of interests and thus lies behind any foreign policy.

**social science realism** An American theory that international relations are determined by the national interests of states, especially the great powers, who compete for domination especially in military and economic affairs. Their great contest ultimately shapes the relations of all other states.

**society of states** According to Hedley Bull, a society of states exists when a group of states conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and they share in the working of common institutions.

**sociological liberalism** A branch of liberal thinking which stresses that IR is not only about state-state relations; it is also about transnational relations; i.e., relations between people, groups, and organizations belonging to different countries. The emphasis on society as well as the state, on many different types of actor and not just national governments, has led some to identify liberal thought by the term 'pluralism'.

**soft power** Also termed 'co-optive power', soft power is, according to Joseph Nye, the ability to structure a situation so that other nations develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with their own nation.

**solidarism** Along with pluralism, one of two International Society approaches to the potential conflict



between recognition of state sovereignty and respect for human rights. A solidarist view stresses individuals, not states, as the ultimate members of international society; there exist both the right and the duty of states to intervene in foreign countries for humanitarian reasons.

**sovereignty/sovereign state** As applied to a state, sovereignty includes both ultimate internal authority and external recognition. Internally, a state is sovereign when it exercises supreme authority over the affairs and people within its territory; externally, a state is sovereign when it is recognized as such by the international community; i.e., its territorial integrity and internal sovereignty are respected and upheld.

**speech act** A speech act is an utterance that has a performative function, that is, it stands instead of or might even be said to constitute an action. Good examples includes promising other people something or warning them about something.

**state** The main actor in IR, sometimes referred to as a 'country' or a 'nation-state'. The term is used in reference to both the populated territory of the state and the political body that governs that territory. The state is a territory-based socio-political organization entrusted with the responsibility of defending basic social conditions and values, including security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare. Because of their role as protectors of security, states have a monopoly on the authority and power to engage in war. Though states differ in their level of success in defending the aforementioned values, the state is understood to have legal jurisdiction (sovereignty) over its own affairs and population. In popular view, the Peace of Westphalia (1648), following the Thirty Years War, marked the formal beginning of the modern sovereign state and modern international relations.

**'state of nature'** Thomas Hobbes's famous description of the original, pre-civil existence of humankind, a state in which life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. In their natural condition, all people are endangered by everyone else, and nobody is able to ensure his or her security or survival. This mutual fear and insecurity are, according to Hobbes, the driving force behind the creation of the sovereign state.

**state system** An organization of independent states wherein mutual sovereignty is recognized; relations are subject to international law and diplomatic practices; and a balance of power exists among states. Historically, the geopolitical outcome of the Peace of Westphalia was the first (albeit only European) state system in the modern sense. We now speak of a global state system, as the world's inhabitable land is covered entirely by states and their territories. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the break-up of both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and the end of the Cold War, there are now nearly 200 states in the state system.

**strategic realism** This theory developed by Thomas Schelling analyses how a state can employ power to persuade a rival to do what the state desires; i.e., through coercion instead of brute force, which is always dangerous and inefficient. Unlike classical and neoclassical realism, strategic realism does not make normative claims; values are taken as given and not weighed during analysis. Rather, the theory seeks to provide analytical tools for diplomacy and foreign policy, which are seen to be instrumental activities that can best be understood via game-theoretical analysis.

**strong liberals** Are liberal theorists who maintain that qualitative change has taken place in international relations. Today's economic interdependence ties countries much closer together; economies are globalized; production and consumption take place in a worldwide marketplace. It would be extremely costly in welfare terms for countries to opt out of that system. Today, there is also a group of consolidated liberal democracies for whom reversion to authoritarianism is next to unthinkable, because all major groups in society support democracy. These countries conduct their mutual international relations in new and more cooperative ways.

**structural realism** Structural realism is a theory that abstracts away from human nature—indeed, from all domestic factors—in order to solely emphasize the international level of analysis. This is contrary to Classical realism where human nature does most of the explanatory work. Structural realists claim that this way of proceeding is necessary to present a genuine theory of international relations rather than simply describing reality using abstract terms. But they also concede that to make specific predictions or even just to make sense of specific situations that have occurred, a purely structural theory needs to look at domestic factors as well.

**structural violence** The oppression and hardship that people suffer from political and economic structures that subject them to unequal positions. Johan Galtung invented the concept in order to differentiate other types of violence from direct violence.

**structuration** A concept suggested by Anthony Giddens as a way of analysing the relationship between structures and actors. Structures (i.e., the rules and conditions that guide social action) do not determine what actors do in any mechanical way—an impression one might get from the neorealist view of how the structure of anarchy constrains state actors. The relationship between structures and actors involves intersubjective understanding and meaning. Structures do constrain actors, but actors can also transform structures by thinking about them and acting on them in new ways. The notion of structuration, therefore, leads to a less rigid and more dynamic view of the relationship between structure and actors. IR constructivists use this as a starting point for suggesting a less rigid view of anarchy.

**sustainable development** Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (definition by World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).

**terrorism** The unlawful use or threatened use of violence against civilians, often to achieve political, religious, or similar objectives. International terrorism involves the territory or the citizens of more than one country. Terrorism is nothing new; it has probably existed ever since human societies began to regulate the use of violence. It is the unusual scale and intensity of the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, DC, and later attacks in Ankara, Madrid, London, and elsewhere that have put the issue of international terrorism high on the agenda.

**traditional approach to foreign policy** Proponents include Niccolò Machiavelli, Hugo Grotius, and Henry Kissinger. The traditional approach, with its attention to the specific historical foreign policies of a particular country, analyses the substance of foreign policy as practised, as opposed to the systematic theories and explanations advanced by more analytical and scientific approaches to foreign policy.

**Tragedy of the Commons** A metaphor describing collective action problems made famous by the American biologist Garrett Hardin in 1968. Hardin's metaphor concerns the commons of pre-modern rural villages, where farmers had the right to graze their livestock. The tragedy consists in overgrazing, which comes about because each farmer has a self-interest in putting as much livestock on the commons as possible, thereby exceeding its carrying capacity. In International Relations, the metaphor is used to describe how individual states have an interest in free-riding, with a wider community of states or even the international community in general bearing the cost, for instance, due to pollution and climate change.

**verstehen** Max Weber emphasized that the social world (i.e., the world of human interaction) is fundamentally

different from the natural world of physical phenomena. Human beings rely on 'understanding' of each other's actions and assigning 'meaning' to them. In order to comprehend human interaction, we cannot merely describe it in the way we describe physical phenomena, such as a boulder falling off a cliff; we need a different kind of interpretive understanding, or *verstehen*. Is patting another person's face a punishment or a caress? We cannot know until we assign meaning to the act. Weber concluded that 'subjective understanding is the specific characteristic of sociological knowledge'. Constructivists rely on such insights to emphasize the importance of 'meaning' and 'understanding'.

**weak liberals** Liberal theorists who accept a great deal of the realist critique of liberal theory, especially that anarchy persists and there is no escape from self-help and the security dilemma.

**world order** The concept of world order is 'essentially contested'. The 'thin' version of world order (respect for state sovereignty and peace among states) stems from the realist tradition. The much 'thicker' liberal version foresees closer cooperation and the spread of common rules in a world where states increasingly share liberal values (with peace, welfare, security, health, and freedom for all as the ultimate result). In terms of declared ambition, the international society has moved from a thin to a thick version of world order since the Second World War.

**world system analysis** An approach developed by Immanuel Wallerstein. A world system is characterized by a certain economic and a certain political structure with the one depending on the other. In human history, there have been two basic varieties of world systems: world empires and world economies. In world empires, such as the Roman Empire, political and economic control is concentrated in a unified centre. World economies, in contrast, are tied together economically in a single division of labour; but politically, authority is decentralized, residing in multiple polities, in a system of states. Wallerstein's key focus is the analysis of the modern world economy, characterized by capitalism.

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