

## INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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## Summary

To make dynamic and complex world politics comprehensible, different theories and paradigms have been constructed in International Relations as an academic discipline. The first section reviews the evolution from the 1920s through the end of the twentieth century, of the three main schools of International Relations theories—liberalism, realism, and Marxist or critical theories—from original or classical versions to revised neo-versions. Behavioralism, functionalism, constructivism, and feminism supplement the overview. The second section examines the impact of the sudden end of the Cold War upon the International Relations theories and their reaction to it. The final section reviews how International Relations theorists envision the prospects of achieving a sustainable world order.

## 1. Introduction

The decade after the end of the Cold War has witnessed dramatic changes in world politics, such as the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and the widespread eruption of internal conflicts. Resurgent nationalism and religious fundamentalism have generated intense struggles over identities (see *Religion and Politics*). Revolutionary advances in information technology and liberalizing forces have accelerated global economic and financial integration, often accompanied by destabilizing financial flows (see *Power Structure*). The rapid process of globalization and transnationalization has been generating a new “macropolitical agenda” encompassing the environment, population movements, human rights and transnational crime, with renewed emphasis on “human” and “comprehensive” security. Expectations and demands for the expanded role of the United Nations and other international and transnational organizations have risen (see *Human Rights*).

The profound and diverse changes taking place at various levels of social interaction have blurred the distinction between the sub-national, national, and transnational levels. The opposing forces of integration and disintegration (or fragmentation) are transforming and restructuring world politics, raising a number of new issues, which do not fit comfortably within any of the established paradigms. On the other hand, such

features as international anarchy and hierarchy persist, to perpetuate chronic sense of national insecurity. The forces of continuity and change are interacting with those of integration and disintegration in shaping the current and future world politics, complicating the judgment on whether current changes are cyclical or transformative .

To examine the nature of the changes and challenges the world faces today and to understand where it is headed once it moves beyond the current state of upheaval, this section presents six articles focusing respectively on realism, regionalism, international actors, international regime, international system, and peace and security. Six aspects of international relations undergoing transformation with profound implications for the possibility and probability of the world to realize sustainable development and/or order (see *Regionalism*).

## **2. International Politics as a Discipline**

To make dynamic and complex world politics comprehensible, different theories and paradigms have been constructed in International Relations as an academic discipline. International Relations theories can be defined as a system of the concepts, propositions and values through which international relations are to be understood as a whole. Paradigms are “fundamental assumptions scholars make about the world they are studying. Paradigms as dominant ways of looking at a subject influence selections of most important characteristics, puzzles, and criteria to guide investigation.

### **2.1 An Overview**

As Brecher observes, the ground of the International Relations agenda during the twentieth century has shifted from legal and formal-structural aspects of international institutions. It centered on the League of Nations, in the 1920s; the Realism–Idealism debate in the 1930s and 1940s; decision-making and Neo-functionalism in the 1950s and 1960s; Neo-realism, Neo-institutionalism, and Comparative foreign policy, and Political psychology in the 1970s; Critical theory, Post-modernism and Feminism in the 1980s; and Constructivism in the 1990s.” A brief overview of the evolution of theories follows.

### **2.2 Liberalism, Realism, Marxism**

Mainstream debate in International Relations has evolved around the division between realism and liberalism. As both schools of thought originated in the rich and powerful parts of the world, they tend to concentrate on the issues and concerns of the rich and powerful countries of the “North” and neglect those of the poorer countries of the “South.”

The critical theories of various lineages to fill this gap emerged in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s and formulated the views from the South. The core-periphery, dependency, and world system theories all seek to explain the political and economic subordination of the South to the North in terms of a structural relationship between the two.

Considerable cross-fertilization of ideas has occurred among various strands of the

realist, liberal, and critical theories to produce a significant degree of commonality and communicability.

### 2.2.1 Liberalism

Liberal internationalism inspired by the First World War is generally regarded as the origin of International Relations as an academic discipline (see *Nationalism*). Mass destruction wrought by the first total war in human history had led liberal internationalists mainly in the US and Britain to look beyond the failure of diplomacy to find the real causes of the war in the failure of the system of international relations. They argued that the war could be prevented if there were institutional mechanisms for peaceful settlement of dispute and public assurance of security. Assuming that the people do not want war, unless they are prevented from knowing their real interests by ignorance or by contriving militarists or autocrats eager to wage war, Woodrow Wilson, then president of the US, took leadership in establishing the League of Nations to fill this alleged institutional void (see *Liberalism*).

### 2.2.2 Realism

In the 1930s, however, the liberal institutionalist expectation was shattered by a chain of events from economic collapse to aggression in Asia, Africa and Europe, and the League's failure to prevent another global war, spawning the first "Great Debate" in the discipline between liberal internationalism and realism (see *Realism*). The title of Reinhold Niebuhr's 1932 book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* succinctly conveyed the realist message that men's capacity to be good was always in conflict with the sinful drives for acquisition and aggression. These drives tended to manifest in full scope in the collective human behaviors and, Niebuhr cautioned, were unlikely to be tamed by such bodies as the League of Nations. The outbreak of war was blamed on the utopianism of liberal institutionalism and its naive and moralistic assumption that blinded policymakers from the realities of power politics. Realist theory is built on the pessimistic view of human nature as intrinsically selfish and human behavior as driven by a lust for power.

The intellectual roots of realism go back to the ancient Greek historian Thucydides, as well as the sixteenth-century Italian theorist Niccolò Machiavelli and the English philosopher Thomas Hobbs. Realism formulated in the first half of the twentieth century by such scholars as E. H. Carr, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Hans Morgenthau shares the pessimistic view that there is no final escape from inherently insecure and conflicting human condition, and hence is called neo-classical realism. Neo-classical realism also shares the belief that statecraft in international politics requires hard-nosed awareness that political ethics and private ethics are different and that foreign policy conduct inevitably involves morally dubious or even evil actions. Neither Carr nor Morgenthau, however, denied the hope for peace or rejected a role for international law or organization. What they objected to was liberalism's utopian emphasis on the progression toward justice and cooperation in disregard of regression and conflict. This emphasis on normative aspects of realism separates classical and neo-classical realism from neo-realism which ignores such ethics of statecraft.

### 2.2.3 Marxist Theories

During the 1960s, new issues and cleavages emerged to define the global agenda. As the Cold War confrontation waned, concerns over problems of the North–South imbalances deepened and stimulated a cluster of theories influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideas. They sought to explain the global wealth and income disparity in the framework of a general theory on how the world as a whole works. Extending Marx’s theory that the capitalist class uses its economic power to exploit and oppress the working class to the global North–South relationship, they argued that the world capitalist system is so structured that the developing countries of the South (in the periphery) are enslaved to be exploited by the developed countries (of the center). The world’s poor nations are subjected to the position of dependency on the world’s rich in the single international capitalist economy controlled by the North.

**Dependency Theory.** The dependency school’s intellectual father, Raul Prebisch pinpointed in his that at the root of dependency was the division of labor characterized by unfavorable terms of trade for the peripheral countries, in which they must sell raw materials and buy finished goods from the developed countries. Andre Gunder Frank argued that as long as the capitalist system exists there will be unequal exchange and appropriation of economic surplus by the Northern center, and that the South is condemned to the state of underdevelopment. For its focus on the exploitative structure of the international capitalist system, this school is also called critical structuralism. It rejects the liberal assumption of a comparative advantage and regards “free trade” and foreign investment as vehicles for the industrialized metropolitan North to penetrate and continue exploitation of the peripheral South initiated during the colonial era. The structure of dependence is fortified by technological dependence and cultural imperialism, and perpetuated by the cooperation of the co-opted elite class of the South.

Later, confronted by the need to explain rapid export-led economic growth of the “Newly Industrializing Economies” in Asia, dependency theorists introduced the concept of “dependent development.” They argued that economic growth of peripheral areas was possible but within the confines of the dominance-dependence relationship between the center and the periphery.

**The World-System Theory: Wallerstein.** Analyzing the historical development of the capitalist world economy since the sixteenth century, Immanuel Wallerstein envisions the world economy as an integrated single capitalist world-system, consisting of a hierarchy of core (Western Europe, North America, and Japan), semi-periphery, and periphery. The core zone has accumulated its wealth at the cost of the peripheral zone. By introducing the category of the semi-periphery, he has recognized the possibility of some countries of the periphery to move up to the semi-periphery and further to the core. This possibility, however, is limited only to a few countries in the periphery. While discussing the interaction of state power and economic forces in the world system, this group regards class as the basic unit of social analysis, if not the actors of world politics per se.

As world-system theory’s prediction of a socialist-world-system to replace the capitalist world-system has proved wrong, Wallerstein now regards the end of the Cold War and

the collapse of the Soviet bloc as a phase of the development of the world economy. For the longer-term future, he foresees the demise of the capitalist world system.

### **2.3 Behavioralism**

In the 1960s, a new generation of International Relations scholars grouped as behavioralists emerged to challenge the realist's methodology for its failure to explain the observable evolution and transformation of the international system such as the growth of collaborative multilateral institutions. They called for the application of scientific methods to the study of international relations, to find recurring behavioral patterns or the "laws" from observable facts and measurable data.

Thus, the second Great Debate began between Traditionalists and Behavioralists over methodology—the principles and procedures for investigating international phenomena. For behavioralists, science is primarily a generalizing activity and a theory should be a statement of the relationship between two or more variables that specifies the conditions that explain change in specific international relationship(s) under investigation. They sought to replace subjective beliefs with verifiable knowledge, impressionism and intuition with testable evidence, and data, and mere opinion with reproducible information. They rejected the traditional realists' anecdotal use of history and wisdom literature and their tendency to choose convenient facts and cases that fits their preexisting hunches. They called instead for rigorous, systematic, scientific concepts and reasoning. Morton Kaplan, for example, reformulated the old theory of balance of power in new rigorous models. J. D. Singer and his associates, generated new historical databases and time-series in support of their study on "Correlates of War." Others used mathematical models in the study of decisions.

In his 1969 writing, David Easton, an earlier advocate of behavioralism, launched a critical self-scrutiny to usher in a period of post-behavioralism. The behavioralists were criticized for their lack of attention to real-world problems and policymakers' needs and for their indifference to ethical aspects of poverty, hunger, violence, and other forms of social problems. Also questioned was the relevance of the behavioralist research based on the past patterns of human behavior to the study of the rapidly changing current and future world.

### **2.4 Functionalism**

Inspired by European integration, another stream of functionalist and neo-functionalist variants of liberalism emerged from the late 1950s through the mid-1960s. Ernst Haas and David Mitrany led lively discussion on regional integration. Some research programs employed behavioralist analytical tools.

Instead of calling for the establishment of some kind of central world government, which requires the surrender of sovereignty by the states, functionalists called for transnational cooperation at first in technical fields. Earlier examples of such technical problem-solving cooperation for mutual benefits include the Rhine River Commission (1804), the Danube River Commission (1857), the International Telegraphic Union (1865), and the Universal Postal Union (1865). They anticipated that cooperative habits

learned in one field would “spill over” in other technical fields, and multiply transnational bonds. Such process would further spill over to the political fields, they argued, and build the foundation for “peace by pieces,” by fostering a “security community” (where inter-state wars become unthinkable) among the partner states.

These ideas inspired the United Nations’ special agencies and other international organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as the European Community. Multinational corporations were not included in such integrative agents in the original functionalist formulations, but are now recognized as powerful agents of economic integration and promoters of the borderless world (see *Regionalism*).

## **2.5 Neofunctionalism, Neo-realism, and Neo-liberal Institutionalism**

### **2.5.1 Neofunctionalism**

In the 1950s, pointing to the reality that “technical” cooperation to cope with such problems as contagious disease and labor disputes is fraught with political squabbles and more often than not dominated by political considerations, some functionalists, termed neo-functionalists, questioned the spillover theory. They observed that technical or functional areas and political areas couldn’t be separated, and called for the creation of international institutions that directly address political factors and political issues, rather than avoiding them (see *Actors in World Politics*). Political institutions created to expedite cooperation in politically controversial areas, they claim, generate new pressures to expand the benefits further, leading to the creation of additional institutions and political integration of states. Expanding network of interdependence, neo-functionalists anticipate, reduces state’s incentives to wage war.

Western Europe has been the leading example of neo-functionalist experiment. Jacques Delors, former President of the European Commission, recalled in 1995: “Building Europe has never been a long, calm river. There are moments of stagnation, or crises.” Political union to include Eastern Europe encompassing 26 states may not be achieved by 2010 but, analysts concur, Western Europe has succeeded in building a security community in which inter-state war has become unthinkable. Following the European model, neo-functionalist approaches to integration have been tried in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The record has been rather disappointing. Spillback (the failure of a regional integration scheme) and spillover (stagnation of regional integration scheme or activities in one area work against integration in another) have been added to the functionalist vocabulary.

Moreover, the record indicates a disturbing trend of political disintegration in many multiethnic countries torn apart by ethnic and religious tension. According to a UN study, the world could fracture into 500 states from the current 200.

### **2.5.2 Neorealism**

In response to criticisms and challenges from behavioralism, Kenneth N. Waltz sought to reconstruct various disjointed realist “thoughts” into a general theory. In his

pioneering effort to reformulate political realism into a rigorous, deductive systemic theory of international politics, Waltz has retained realist emphasis on anarchy as the central feature of the international system, states as the primary actors, and self-help as a guiding principle. Waltz departs from classical realism by placing sole emphasis on the structure of the international system defined in terms of the distribution of capabilities, rather than the character of political leaders or regime types, as the crucial determinants of state actions (see *Realism*). He claims that the continuity in structure explains the repeated use of foreign policy methods regardless of difference in the persons and states in charge.

Neo-realists emphasize the states' sensitivity to their relative position in the distribution of power by drawing attention to a state's fear that, if the other party gains more, that gain can be used to threaten its survival. Neo-realists conclude that this condition of insecurity and uncertainty works against cooperation. The possibility of mutual gains is not enough for insuring cooperation. In the anarchical structure, what matters, is not "Will both of us gain?" but "Who will gain more?" (see *Power Structure*).

### 2.5.3 Hegemonic Stability Theory and Neo-liberal Institutionalism

Meanwhile, however, the number and level of international cooperation was rising, with international organizations and non-state actors as vital promoters. Liberal institutionalists challenged how realists could explain the growth of cooperative multilateral institutions such as the Bretton Woods system and the European Community and states' willingness to abide by ethical principles and agreements.

A realist answer was the theory of hegemonic stability, developed by Robert Gilpin on the basis of a theory first set out by economist, Charles Kindleberger in 1973. Such cooperation has become possible because of the existence of a hegemonic power—Great Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the US in the post-Second World War era—that is able and willing to use its power and position to provide international public goods to create international regimes fostering the free trade system and to enforce free-trade rules (see: *Free Trade*).

While accepting hegemonic stability thesis, neo-liberal institutionalists have offered a rationalist explanation for the existence of international regimes and institutions even when a hegemon has lost its predominant power. By designing international regimes and institutions, which "could provide information, monitor compliance, increase iterations, facilitate issue linkages, define cheating, and offer salient solution," states know that they could change the costs of alternatives and alter strategies. By reducing transaction costs and uncertainty, they argue, institutionalization enables states to achieve their objectives more efficiently.

Dismissing this neo-liberal view as false promise of international institutions, neo-realists stick to the position that cooperation is intrinsically limited by the states' primary concern about distributional conflicts and relative gains. Neo-liberals argue that states would be more concerned with the lack of predictability and market failure and opt for the absolute gains from international cooperation. Whether regimes matter in international society is a related focus of contention.



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### **Biographical Sketch**

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