

# Detailed Notes on International Relations Theories

## Realism



- Power-oriented theory
- State is the highest authority or principal actor
- Realists see the world 'as it is' not "as it ought to be"
- Realism assumes that conflict is an unavoidable part of international relations. Due to the anarchic nature of the system and the competitive pursuit of power, states are constantly in competition, and war is always a possibility.
- 3 s: state(principal actor), self help, survival
- **Core Idea:** International politics is governed by an anarchic structure where states prioritize power and security over morality or cooperation. States act in their self-interest to survive in a competitive system.

## Key Assumptions:

1. **Human Nature**
  - Classical realists, like Hans Morgenthau, argue that human nature is inherently selfish, power-driven, and aggressive, egoistic.
  - This behavior drives state actions, as states are led by individuals influenced by these traits.
2. **State-Centrism / Dominance and State Behavior**
  - States seek power and dominance to survive, reflecting the desires of their human leaders.
  - States are the most important actors in international relations, with other entities (like NGOs or international organizations) playing secondary roles.
3. **Anarchy in the International System**
  - The global system is anarchic, meaning there's no higher authority to regulate state behavior.
  - States must navigate relations independently, relying on power to defend themselves and ensure survival.
4. **Self-Help Principle**
  - Each state prioritizes its self-interest and security, acting as a rational, independent actor.
  - States rely on their own capabilities—especially military power—to protect themselves, form alliances, and deter threats.
5. **No Central Authority**
  - No authoritative global government exists to enforce laws or resolve disputes.
  - International relations are governed by power dynamics, not universal rules or institutions.
6. **Weaponization and Arms Race**
  - States accumulate military and economic resources to maintain security and deter attacks.
  - A constant race for arms creates a "negative peace," with tensions high but outright conflict avoided.
7. **Survival as the Ultimate Goal**
  - A state's primary objective is survival and security, which drives its foreign policies.
  - National interest, especially sovereignty and power, is paramount.

- **Power Politics:** Military and economic power determine state behavior.
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## Philosophical Roots

- **Thomas Hobbes** (1588–1679)
  - In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes describes human nature as selfish and power-seeking, leading to an anarchic "state of nature."
  - This philosophy heavily influences classical realism, emphasizing the need for power and self-preservation in a lawless international system.
  - Critiques utopian model (cooperation)
- **Variants/ Types of Realists:**
  - **Classical Realism:**
    - Influenced by thinkers like Hobbes, Thucydides, and Morgenthau, Machiavellian.
    - Emphasizes the role of human nature in driving conflict and the pursuit of power.
- Human beings, according to this view, are inherently selfish, and their desire for power translates into the behavior of states.

Example: Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* outlines six principles of realism, focusing on power as the main determinant of state actions.

## Structural Realism (Neorealism):

- **Kenneth Waltz's** *Theory of International Politics* argues that the anarchic structure of the international system (lack of central authority) shapes state behavior.
- **States prioritize their security and survival**, guided by two approaches:
  - **Defensive Realism:** States seek to balance power and avoid unnecessary conflicts to ensure survival.
  - **Offensive Realism:** States aim to maximize power and dominance (e.g., achieving hegemony for security).
- **National interest and survival are central to state actions in this framework.**

## Critiques:

- Neglects non-state actors and the role of international institutions.
- Overemphasizes conflict and underestimates the potential for cooperation.
- Lacks focus on global issues like climate change, health, and human rights.
- Extreme state-centric model
- Totally rejects the idealist model
- World is anarchic -need to maximize power
- Competition, jealousy, rivalry
- **Overemphasis on Conflict:** Critics argue that realism focuses too much on conflict and power struggles, neglecting cooperation, institutions, and the role of non-state actors.

- **Neglect of Domestic Politics:** Realism tends to ignore how internal political structures, ideologies, and leadership can influence a state's foreign policy.
- **Lack of Moral Considerations:** Realism is often criticized for sidelining ethical concerns, focusing instead on self-interest and power politics.



## Key Contributions to Realist Thought:

1. **E.H. Carr**
  - **Work:** *"The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919–1939"*
  - **Contribution:** Critiqued utopianism and distinguished it from realism, shaping modern realist thought. Highlighted that international morality often reflects the interests of powerful states.
2. **Hans Morgenthau**
  - **Work:** *"Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power"* (called the "bible" of political science).
  - **Contribution:** Known as the father of classical realism, Morgenthau argued that politics is governed by objective laws based on human nature, particularly the pursuit of power.

## Six Principals of Morgenthau

1. Human nature is aggressive
2. States should keep working to maximize their power
3. National interest is top priority of states. National interest is always tied to the acquisition or maintenance of power.
4. Statism-state is the principal actor
5. No morality- Moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in the same way as individuals: Morality may influence decisions, but states must act in their interest, even if it conflicts with moral norms. States approach is beyond morality.
6. **Politics is an autonomous** - International politics should be understood on its own terms, based on power dynamics, not through the lens of morality or law. Politics has its own rules and laws.

## The Tale of Realism in International Relations (Behr and Kirke)

1. **Historical Context of Realism:**
  - Traditional realism often associates figures like Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Morgenthau with power politics and selfish strategies.
  - This narrative oversimplifies and misrepresents the original ethical and normative dimensions of these thinkers.
2. **Normative Commitments in Realism:**
  - Early realists emphasized self-constraint, ethics, and universal values.
  - They focused on the balance of interests and avoiding reckless power-seeking behavior.

### 3. **Misinterpretations of Realism:**

- Realism became associated with Cold War ideologies and positivist approaches.
- This led to a distorted view of key thinkers as purely power-driven rather than ethically grounded.

### 4. **Specific Contributions:**

- **Thucydides:** Emphasized ethical constraints and criticized moral decay in war.
- **Machiavelli:** Advocated republican stability and ethical diplomacy.
- **Hobbes:** Stressed the role of legitimacy and the ethical implications of sovereignty.
- **Morgenthau:** Criticized unmoderated power politics and promoted ethics as an anti-hubris device.

### 5. **Call for Ethical Renewal in IR:**

- The authors argue for reintroducing ethics and universal ontologies in International Relations (IR).
  - A balance between diverse cultural narratives and a universal ethical framework is needed for meaningful progress.
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## 2. Liberalism

- **Core Idea:** Cooperation among states is possible and desirable, driven by shared interests, economic interdependence, and the spread of democratic values.
- **Key Beliefs:**
  1. **Democracy and Peace:** Democratic Peace Theory (by Immanuel Kant and others) suggests that democracies are less likely to go to war with each other.
  2. **Economic Interdependence:** Free trade creates mutual benefits, reducing the likelihood of conflict.
  3. **Institutions:** International organizations (e.g., the UN, WTO) create rules and norms that encourage cooperation and resolve disputes.
  4. **Rule of Law:** Disputes can be resolved peacefully through legal frameworks rather than military conflict.
- **Variants:**
  - **Institutional Liberalism:** Institutions mitigate the effects of anarchy by promoting transparency, reducing uncertainty, and enabling repeated interactions (e.g., NATO, EU).
  - **Neoliberalism:**
    - Focuses on global challenges like environmental issues, human rights, and health security.
    - Advocates for absolute gains (benefits for all) rather than relative gains (benefits compared to others).
- **Critiques:**
  - Liberalism is sometimes considered overly idealistic, assuming states will prioritize cooperation over self-interest.
  - Interventionist tendencies (e.g., promoting democracy through war) can undermine liberal ideals.
  - Critics argue liberalism is often Eurocentric, ignoring alternative governance systems.

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### 3. Constructivism

- **Core Idea:** The international system is shaped by ideas, norms, and identities rather than just material factors like power or security. State behavior is influenced by shared beliefs and social constructs.
- **Key Points:**
  1. **Social Meaning:** Objects like military power or trade policies derive significance from the ideas and norms associated with them.
    - Example: U.S. perceives the UK's nuclear arsenal differently than North Korea's because of shared norms and identity.
  2. **Norms and Identity:** State actions are guided by what is considered appropriate (logic of appropriateness) rather than only self-interest (logic of consequences).
    - Example: The norm of sovereignty discourages intervention in other states' internal affairs.
  3. **Role of Non-State Actors:** NGOs, international organizations, and transnational corporations influence norms and state behavior.
    - Example: Advocacy against landmines or climate change initiatives led by NGOs like Greenpeace.
  4. **Dynamic System:** State identities and interests evolve over time based on changing norms, beliefs, and interactions.
- **Critiques:**
  - Constructivism is criticized for being overly focused on ideational factors, neglecting material realities like economic inequality or military power.
  - Lacks predictive power due to its reliance on subjective interpretations.

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### 4. Institutionalism

- **Core Idea:** Despite an anarchic system, states can cooperate through institutions that create rules, norms, and practices to reduce uncertainty and foster trust.
- **Mechanisms for Cooperation:**
  1. **Iterated Interactions:** Institutions provide long-term frameworks, encouraging states to comply with agreements to maintain good reputations.
  2. **Information Sharing:** Institutions monitor and verify state behavior, reducing the risk of cheating.
  3. **Efficiency:** By providing forums for negotiation and decision-making, institutions reduce transaction costs for states.
- **Comparison with Realism:**
  - Like realists, institutionalists recognize anarchy and state-centric politics but argue that cooperation is rational and achievable.
  - Realists view institutions as reflections of power dynamics, while institutionalists see them as independent actors that shape behavior.
- **Critiques:**

- Overestimates the willingness of states to cooperate.
  - Critics argue institutions often reflect the interests of powerful states, reinforcing existing inequalities.
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## 5. Critical Approaches

- **Overview:** These perspectives challenge dominant theories by focusing on marginalized voices and alternative paradigms.
    - **Marxism:** Examines global capitalism and class relations as the root causes of conflict and inequality.
      - Example: Dependency Theory highlights the exploitation of developing countries by wealthy states.
    - **Feminism:** Investigates the role of gender in international relations, emphasizing how policies disproportionately affect women and marginalized groups.
    - **Post-Colonialism:** Explores the lasting impact of colonialism on global power dynamics and state behavior.
      - Example: The Global South's resistance to Western-dominated institutions like the IMF.
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## 6. The English School

- **Core Idea:** Combines elements of realism and constructivism, arguing that states form an "international society" governed by shared norms, values, and institutions.
  - **Key Concepts:**
    1. **International Society:** Despite anarchy, states abide by rules and norms that create order (e.g., sovereignty, diplomacy, balance of power).
    2. **Historical Context:** Emphasizes the importance of understanding historical developments to explain state behavior.
    3. **Institutions:** Institutions like international law, diplomacy, and great power management mediate anarchy and create stability.
  - **Critiques:**
    - Focuses more on interpretation than developing testable hypotheses.
    - Critics argue it lacks the rigor of realism or liberalism.
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# Notes on Idealism in International Politics

## Overview of Idealism

The belief that reality is based on ideas and thoughts, and that ideals can be achieved. Idealists tend to be positive thinkers, and believe that things like beauty and justice are real because they are ideas.

### 1. Definition:

- Idealism in international politics emphasizes moral values, ethical principles, and cooperation over power politics.
- Advocates for diplomacy, collective security, and the establishment of international institutions.

### 2. Historical Context:

- Rooted in Enlightenment ideals, particularly the belief in human progress and rationality.
- Post-World War I, idealism influenced policies aimed at preventing future conflicts.

### 3. Key Proponents:

- Thinkers like Immanuel Kant advocated for perpetual peace through international cooperation.
- Wilsonian Idealism, **Woodrow Wilson's Role**: The key figure in promoting Idealism was **Woodrow Wilson**, whose **Fourteen Points** outlined principles for peace, including self-determination, free trade, and collective security. His vision for a world governed by moral principles influenced the creation of the **League of Nations**.

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## Major Themes and Principles

### 1. International Cooperation:

- Central to idealism is the idea that nations should work together for mutual benefit and global peace.
- Creation of international laws and norms to manage conflicts and foster unity.

### 2. Human Nature: Idealism is based on the belief that humans are essentially good and capable of rational decision-making and cooperation. States, like individuals, should act in morally responsible ways.

### 3. Peace and Conflict Resolution/ collective security:

- Advocates for peaceful negotiations and arbitration over military confrontation.
- Emphasis on disarmament and reducing the arms race.

### 4. Role of International Institutions:

- Establishment of bodies like the League of Nations, later the United Nations.
- Focus on providing platforms for dialogue and collective action.

### 5. Moral Authority:

- Politics guided by moral standards rather than pure self-interest.

- Promotion of values like justice, freedom, and equality on the international stage.
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## Criticism and Limitations



1. **Naivety of Human Nature:**
    - Critics argue idealism underestimates the role of power and national interests in international relations.
    - Realism counters idealism by focusing on pragmatism and power dynamics.
  2. **Ineffectiveness in Practice:**
    - Failure of the League of Nations highlighted the challenges of enforcing collective security. The inability to stop aggression by fascist powers revealed the limitations of Idealist thought, especially its reliance on moral persuasion without sufficient enforcement mechanisms.
    - Difficulty in reconciling diverse national interests under a unified moral framework.
  3. **Impact of Realpolitik(Realism):**
    - Nations often prioritize strategic interests over moral obligations, undermining idealist goals.
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## Idealism's Impact:

- **Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations:** Idealist principles heavily influenced the Treaty of Versailles and the establishment of the League of Nations. The League was designed to be a platform for diplomacy and collective action to avoid future wars.
- **Post-WWI Peace Efforts:** Idealism drove international efforts to secure peace through treaties, international laws, and the establishment of global organizations. The aim was to build a world where diplomacy, not war, would settle disputes.

## Legacy and Modern Relevance

1. **Influence on International Law:**
    - Shaped the development of treaties, human rights laws, and the UN Charter.
    - Ongoing efforts for global cooperation reflect idealist principles.
  2. **Contemporary Movements:**
    - Advocacy for climate change action, nuclear disarmament, and global justice ties back to idealism.
  3. **Balance with Realism:**
    - Many modern theories integrate idealism's normative (how things should be) focus with realism's practical approach, e.g., neoliberal (free market) institutionalism.
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This summary provides a more detailed look at the document's treatment of **Idealism**, its rise after WWI, the key concepts it introduced, its role in shaping global politics, its eventual decline with the failure of the League of Nations, and its lasting influence on contemporary international relations.