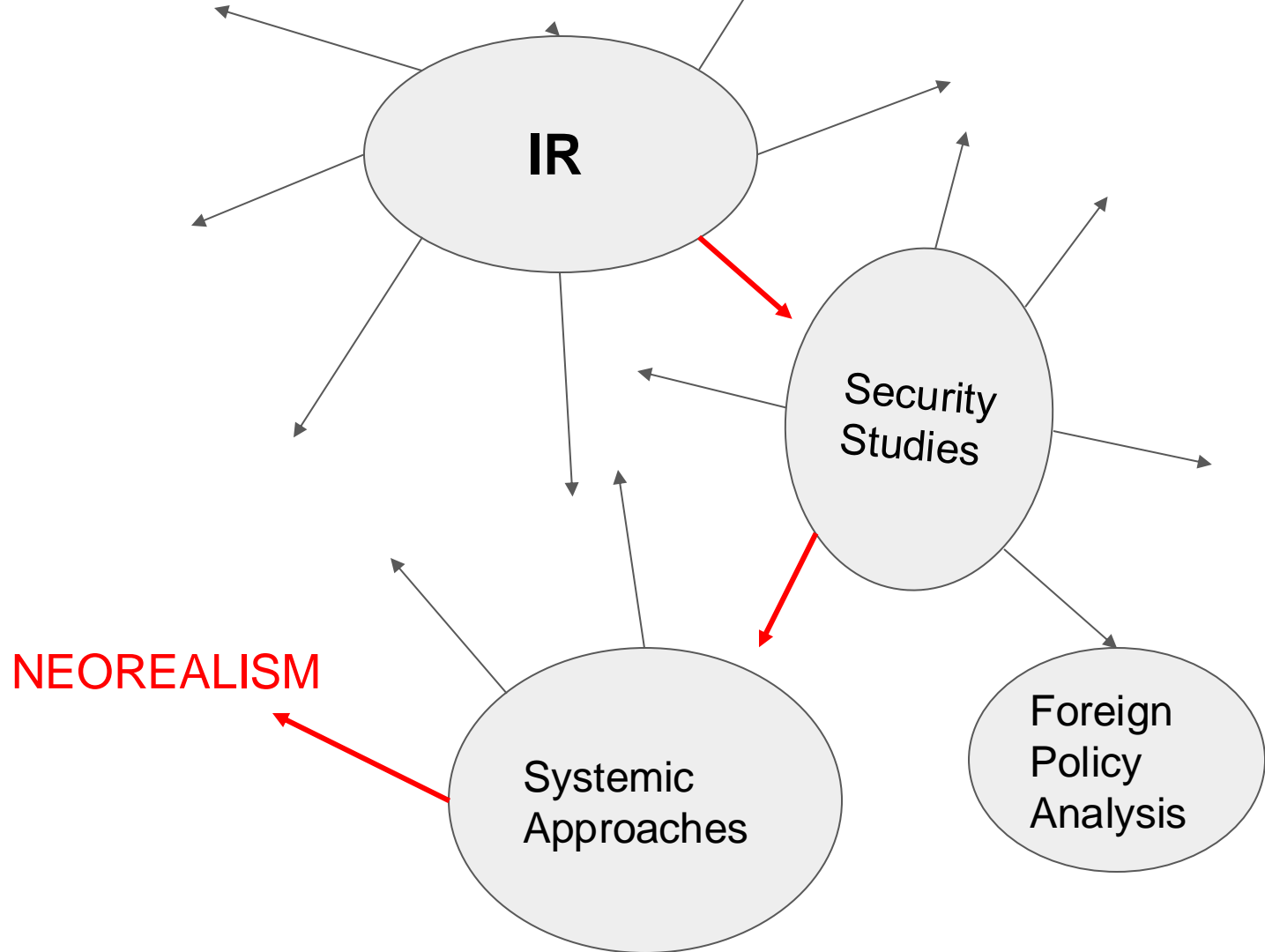


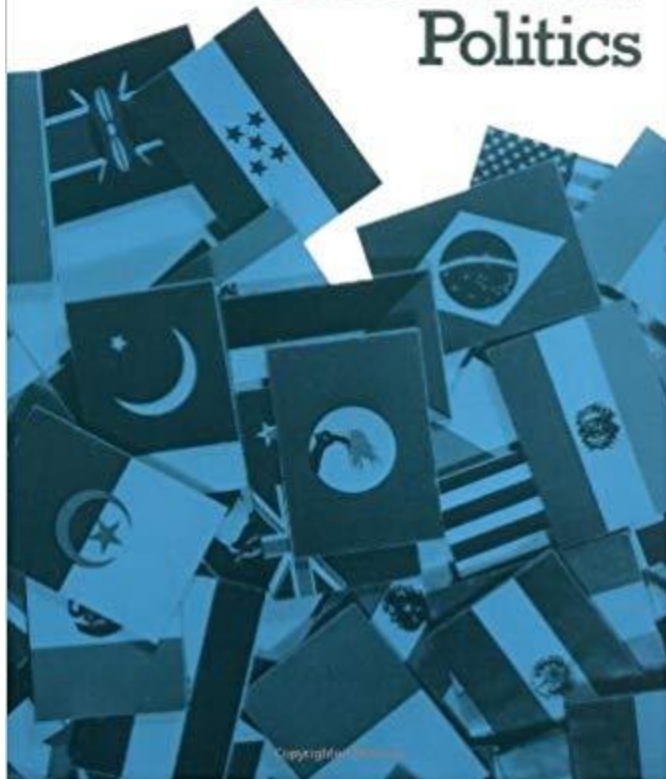
Neorealism & International Security



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KENNETH N. WALTZ

Theory of International Politics



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- Why does the international system reproduce itself?
- Why does war persist despite the advancement of human civilization?
- Why does the foreign policy of many states remain relatively constant over time?
- Why don't states cooperate more even though they would economically benefit from it?

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- By focussing on the international system as the key explanatory factor, **NOT** human nature or political conditions inside states
- **Aim:** to explain the particular (state behaviour) with reference to the general (the international system) rather than vice versa.
- Its systemic focus makes Neorealism seductively elegant and parsimonious, but also highly abstract and difficult to understand.

Why is it important to study Neorealism?

Because many subsequent theoretical strands are either an elaboration of Neorealism or an attempt to refute it.

However, in many textbooks Neorealism is somewhat caricatured.

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- States live in international anarchy, defined as the absence of overarching coercive authority.
- State survival is thus a matter of self-help. There are no guarantees because there is no guarantor.

Claim 1: Anarchy limits cooperation and interdependence among states

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- 2) because states fear that other states will cheat.
- 3) because states fear becoming weaker **relative** to other states (even if cooperation would benefit them in absolute terms)

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- States cannot confidently interpret one another's intentions. Therefore they arm themselves for (mostly) defensive purposes.
- **But:** the more states arm themselves, the **less secure** they collectively become.
- **Aggravating factor:** small risks incurred by “trusting too much” become large risks in the long run and endanger states' survival.

Why can't states collectively disarm?

Because international anarchy means that there is no guarantee that others won't cheat.

Claim 3: Anarchy causes states to counterbalance one another's power to protect their relative position

- Power is counterbalanced (individually and/or through alliances).
Current examples: US vs. China; Arab states vs. Iran; NATO vs. Russia, etc.
 - Balance configurations oscillate between bipolar (e.g. Cold War) and multipolar (e.g. the present).
 - Bipolar balances tend to be more stable.

Claim 4: Anarchy causes states to fill power vacuums to protect their relative position

Examples: foreign involvement in civil wars (e.g. Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, etc.).

For some Neorealists, even colonialism was based on this logic. The “scramble for Africa” was less about Africa itself than about the relative position of European colonial powers vis-à-vis one another.

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- **ensure that your objectives do not exceed your capabilities**

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- This operates as a kind of Darwinian selection mechanism. Even tiny states can survive if they **adapt to their relative position** (e.g. Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino).
- The internal makeup of states is important to understand particular cases, but not the overall workings of the international system.

Questions and Criticisms:

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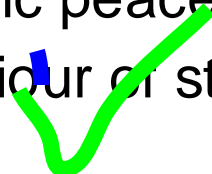
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