# Notes on realism

Realism is about power and geography

Security is paramount

It’s unemotional

End justifies the means

Everything is underpinned by military and economic power. The balance of state power is what mitigates this. (everyone is strong.)

Not underpinned by ethics

Deeply pessimistic about human nature

Russia’s “near abroad” and “far abroad”

Thomas Hobbes and Machiavelli, john Locke (“power fear and energy”), henry Kissinger (statism, survival, self-help), yes minister (humphrey)

Government’s duty is the survival of the state (through power, primarily-military & economic)

Realistic really believe in coercion and deterrence

Don’t believe in supernational authorities (such as the UN)

A state exists apart from society, own ID and instests vis a vis the intelligence community

Realism dominates IR now

State centric

Classical realism “realpolitik”

Lord Palmerston in house of commons “we have no eternal allies an dwe have no perpetrual enemies. Our interest are eternal and perpetual

Rise and fall of hegemon

Bismark was a classical realist

Treaty of Versailles is a realist dictate

Classical – from human nature

Neo - anarchatic state system

Neoclassical – combination of both

Classical (modern) realism: Hans J Morgenthau politics among nations

USA lesson from WW2, they cannot allow military power to wane

US realism to USSR, that they had to “contain” the USSR. Keenan ambassador. Would collapse from within – he was right.. NSC-68 (Truman doctrine). Guiding principle for American foreign policy until 1990s.

Threat-counter threat.

Putin is an “offensive structural realist”

Russia inherently believes that they have the right to intervene in the near and far abroad.

Putin: collapse of USSR was the greatest single geopolitical catastrophe of 20th century.

The security dilemma argues that tech arms races etc., is based on “fear, cooperation and trust” via the “spiral model”. Each side is in complete fear and ignorance of the other.

# LIBERALISM

Completely at odds with realist theory

John Stuart mill, jean Baptists Rousseau, Emmanuel Kant (founding father), Adam smith, john Locke (founding father), (Wolfe Tone)

Where realists don’t see personal /freedom and liberty as the priority, the see the state as the centre. Liberals believe in the power of freedom. Don’t take the ‘cynical’ view that mankind is inherently corrupt. Kant believes that goodness can progress. Believe in democratic government and ergo big institutions. EU is a classical liberal construct.

Putin constantly would seek to undermine the EU to prevent the liberal ideals seeping into Russia. He sees the EU as an existential threat.

Liberals believe in the free market capitalism. Free trade etc.

The speak of the social contract

Allies well with republicanism.

Bismark was opposite to liberal.

Kant believes in the possibility of perpetual peace, though admits it may not be possible and therefore we should act as though it’s possible.

Believe in multinationalism . rule by government is restrained. Strong trade relationships

simply will mitigate war. Simply put, war is bad for business.

Act only in the accordance with the law

Liberals will argue that if you combine democracy with and open economy you’ll mitigate war. You therefore don’ t need a lot of hard military power.

Standards and conventions: air traffic control etc.

The EU is the apex of what Kant espoused.

The problem is that in practice the results of liberalism are often illiberal

# NEO REALISM IS CRUCIAL TO UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD DURING THE LAST 20-30 YEARS

Tampering with the system won’ t fix things because you’re not getting rid of the underlying causes – which I think is the system itself

Neorealism tries to explain why the international system reproduces itself, why war persists despite the advancement of human civilisation, why states don’t cooperate more even though they would benefit economically from it

Neorealism seeks to explain this by: focusing on the international system as a key explanatory factory not human nature or political conditions inside states;

Core assumptions; states are the agents of IR; states live in a condition that they call ‘international anarchy’ defined as the absence of overarching coercive authority.

anarchy limits cooperation and interdependence amongst states because:

Claim 1: because States fear that dependence on other states could be exploited

Claim 2: because states fear that other states will cheat

Claim 3: because states fear becoming weaker relative to other states (even if cooperation would benefit them in absolute terms). It may be a win/win, but it’s rarely 50/50. Anarchy causes states to counterbalance one another’s relative power: Over time they oscillate between multipolarity and bipolarity. Bipolar balances tend to be more stable.

Without the presence of an ‘international state’ we need trust. To have trust we need info on the other state. That information is never perfect. States have to worry about the long term. Ye the more states arm themselves, the less secure which they collectively become. We’d all be better of disarming but there’s no way for us to trust that this will work. Small risks incurred by trusting too much become large risks over the long term.

Ireland’s policy is basically unchanged, good relations with UK, Europe and USA, use neutrality as a cost saving and security enhancing mechanism. The DF is around because you just don’t know.

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

Neorealist advice to states: you must understand you relative position and balance towards other states.

**Ensure that your objectives do not exceed your capabilities**. If you get this right, a tiny state can do extraordinarily well on the international stage. E.g., San Marino. It’s more about adaptation to the system you’re in, that about power. “States what know how to play the game survive”. The international system will weed-out states who don’t comply with the system. Small states are more adaptable because they sort of strategy small states have to pursue is dictated by their small size. Small countries have to learn how to swallow their pride. Don’t act the way the world you wish the world is. Instead act the way it is.

The internal makeup of states is important to understand particular cases, but not the overall workings of the international system. Neoliberalism can’t tell you (predict) why states make particular foreign policy decisions. Instead it describes why the system is how it is and why it tends to propagate itself. Theories are intended to be broad and simple. (This aligns with Gray’s take on strategy.)

Relative power calculations only seem to matter if there is a rough parity to begin with. Ireland cannot counterbalance China. They are equally disinterested in relative changes in eachother’s power.

Criticism: how does it explain the formation of EU or end of the Cold War. As anarchy creeps back in, then the balance of power changes. If you change the structure, the behaviour changes. Bring structure back and the behaviour [returns??]

Neorealism limitation. It excludes the possibility of systemic change. Only unit-level (states) change could bring about system change, but the unit (states) are themselves the product of the system. Infinite circular reproduction.

“everything that is social is transient, we just don’t know when it will end”