International Relations

1. **What is International Relations?**

DEF: *international relations is the interactions among states*

In international relations there is no world sovereign power over the nations to get them to obey laws and preserve peace.

Sovereignty means that foreign powers have no business intruding into your country’s affairs and where established national sovereignty brings internal peace and law.

In international relations taking the law into your own hands by the threat or use of force is quite normal. Often there is no other recourse: no universally recognized authority exists to resolve disputes.

1. **Power and National Interest**

Since it lacks sovereignty, international relations depend a lot on power: a country’s more general ability to get its way.

Some elements of power such as a country’s geography, natural resources, population, and economy are tangible or calculable. Some of the most important factors, however such as a country’s military capability, the quality of its political system, and its determination can only be estimated until it is involved in a war, where countries pursue their general interest. The war then shows which side had more power.

Foreign policy is inherently an elite game, and elites usually define the national interest.

The diplomat’s work is in finding and developing complementary interests so that two or more countries can work together.

In a democracy, the masses may influence foreign policy but only long after the basic decisions have been made in secrecy. Foreign-policy decisions, even in democracies, are made by perhaps a dozen people.

1. **The Importance of Economics**

Economic is maybe the most influential factor in international relations.

Historically, countries tend to control, regulate, or own their industries. Perhaps the most free-market economy is that of the United States. The Europeans construct welfare states whose taxes work against starting new enterprises. In East Asia, the state guides key industries, aimed at rapid growth.

And a few countries simply prohibit certain foreign imports. Many domestic interest groups have sufficient clout to block foreign goods.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) aims at freer trade by cutting tariffs and other barriers: tariffs are at an all-time low, and most goods flow over the globe, but now nontariff barriers increasingly block trade, many of them concerning nonindustrial products. The few countries that do not play, such as Cuba and North Korea, live in isolation and poverty.

If the WTO system were to break down and the world returned to protected markets, we could see another depression.

Some argue that globalization (*free flow of commerce across borders, making the world one big market*) is the big trend.

Predictions that economic interdependency would prevent war, widely believed before World War I, have proved false. Now some say globalization is reversing: “de-globalization.” Prosperity does not necessarily bring peace. Indeed, newly affluent countries often demand respect, resources, and sometimes territory, creating resentments.

Also, the prosperity offered by globalization does not reach everyone equally.

1. **Why War?**

The theories on the causes of war can be divided into two general camps:

1. Micro Theories

*DEF: theories focused on individuals and small groups and rooted in biology and psychology*

These theories explain war as the result of genetic human aggressiveness that makes people fight.

Most anthropologists reject such biological determinism, arguing that humans exhibit a wide variety of behaviour that can be explained only by culture, that is learned behaviour.

Why aren’t all nations constantly at war? Under what circumstances do humans become aggressive?

The answer: when they think they are being attacked.

1. Macro Theories

DEF: *theories focused on nations’ ambitions, geography and history*

When they can, states expand. Only countervailing power may stop the drive to expand. One country, fearing the growing power of a neighbour, will strengthen its defences or form alliances to offset the neighbour’s power.

Does the pursuit of power lead to war or peace? Again, there are two broad theories.

BALANCE OF POWER

DEF: *System in which major nations form and reform alliances to protect themselves.*

The oldest and most commonly held theory is that peace results when several states use national power and alliances to balance one another. Would-be expansionists are blocked. When the balances broke down, there was war.

HIERARCHY OF POWER

Calculations of power are problematic, so it is impossible to know when power balances. Often periods of peace occurred when power was out of balance, when states were ranked hierarchically in terms of power. Then nations knew where they stood on a ladder of relative power. In transitional times, when the power hierarchy is blurred, countries are tempted to go to war. A big war with a definitive outcome brings peace because then relative power is clearly displayed.

1. Misperception

some thinkers focus on “perception” as the key to war: it is what leaders perceive that makes them decide for war or peace. They often misperceive, seeing hostility and threats from another country, which sees itself as merely defensive.

In misperception or image theory, the psychological and real worlds bounce against each other in the minds of political leaders. They think they are acting defensively, but their picture of the situation may be distorted. Leaders often use ideology and mass media to work citizens into anger and then march to war. Once convinced they are being attacked, otherwise rational people will commit atrocities.

1. **Keeping Peace**

Approaches at keeping peace:

WORLD GOVERNMENT

The real culprit, many claims, is sovereignty itself. States should give up some of their sovereignty (the ability to go to war) to an international entity that would prevent war much as an individual country keeps the peace within its borders.

COLLECTIVE SECURITY

DEF*: An agreement among all nations to automatically counter an aggressor*

The League of Nations tried collective security. Members of the League pledged to join in economic and military action against any aggressor. Aggressors would back down. It was a great idea on paper, but in practice when invasions happened, the League merely studied the situation. Other powers saw no point in entering a distant conflict where they had no interests. The League had no mechanism to make the other countries respond.

FUNCTIONALISM

DEF: *Theory that cooperation in specialized areas will encourage overall cooperation among nations*

Another idea is the one to have countries work together first in specialized or “functional” areas, so they see that they accomplish more by cooperation than by conflict. Increasingly able to trust each other, gradually they will work up to a stable peace. In practice they remain hostile: the specialized organization becomes a scene of conflict.

The functionalist approach has brought some help in world problems but has not touched the biggest problem, war.

THIRD-PARTY ASSISTANCE

DEF: *with third-party we mean a nation not involved in a dispute helping to settle it.*

One way to settle a dispute is to have a third party not involved in the conflict mediate between the contending parties to try to find a middle ground. Third parties can help calm a tense situation and find compromise solutions, but the contenders have to want to find a solution. If not, third-party help is futile.

DIPLOMACY

The oldest approach to preserving peace is through diplomatic contact, with envoys sent from one state to another. A good diplomat knows the interests of the countries involved and suggests compromises that leave both parties at least partly satisfied. This is crucial: There must be willingness to compromise. This can be hard because countries often define their vital, non-negotiable interests grandly and are unwilling to settle for less.

If successful, diplomats draw up treaties, which must be ratified and observed. If one country feels a treaty harms it, there is nothing to stop it from opting out. Countries enter into and observe treaties because it suits them.

PEACEKEEPING

Peacekeeping is the use of third-party military forces to support a ceasefire or truce to end fighting, ex. the blue berets of the UN.

Such forces cannot “enforce peace” by stopping a conflict third party that is still in progress. The only way to do that would be to take sides in the war, and that would be the opposite of peacekeeping.

This kind of actions work only if a peace agreement has been reached beforehand.

1. **Beyond Sovereignty?**

The end of the Cold War and of a violent century brought into question the basic point of international politics, sovereignty. Increasingly, the world community is acting in ways that infringe on the internal workings of sovereign states. Most of the world understood that in some cases sovereignty must be infringed upon.

Starting with the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials in 1945–1946, international law increasingly discounts sovereignty as a cover for mass murder. International law is slowly eating into sovereignty.

A new doctrine, the “responsibility to protect” (R2P), is growing and could someday override sovereignty. The world seems to be changing, willing to move beyond sovereignty and toward some kind of order. The trouble is no one knows what kind of order.

Few wanted the United States to play world cop, but most understood that if there was to be leadership, only America could provide it. A new class of “world-order” issues has emerged, such as climate change, that no country can handle on its own.

* 1. **The United Nations**

The United Nations comes quickly to mind, but it still has problems: as permanent members of the Security Council, Russia and China have the power to veto anything they dislike.

The UN has sent many peacekeepers to observe truces, as in the Middle East and Balkans, but these few and lightly armed forces from small countries were in no position to enforce peace. Without enforcement powers and fragmented into blocs, the UN remained largely a “talking shop.”

* 1. **The NATO**

NATO was arguably the best defensive alliance ever devised, mostly because it is limited in scope, it does not apply everywhere.

There is no organization that can seriously calm and stabilize world trouble spots. Either way, the United States will have to take a leading role if anything is to be done effectively.

1. **U.S Foreign Policy: Involved or Isolated?**

The Cold War created a bipolar system (*System of two large, hostile blocs, each led by a superpower*). Today, many describe the current system as multipolar (*system divided among several power centres*)

Americans, some say, are natural-born isolationists. With Pearl Harbour in 1941, however, isolationism was rejected in favour of massive involvement in world affairs, first in winning World War II and then the Cold War.

* 1. **Cycles of U.S Foreign Policy**

U.S. foreign policy tends to swing between interventionism and isolationism. Many scholars think a middle ground cannot be found they see a pendulum swing between overinvolvement and under-involvement.

Perkins divided American foreign relations in cycles of “relatively pacific feeling,” followed by “rising bellicosity and war,” followed by “post-war nationalism,” and then back to “relatively pacific feeling.

Some argue that since the 2003 Iraq War we have practiced unilateralism (*doing things our way against the wishes of allies*), losing allies and rejecting treaties that most countries want. If we practice unilateralism long enough, however, we may alienate our allies and isolate ourselves. Exercising too much U.S. power could actually lose us the power to influence others.

World War II and the Cold War brought massive U.S. overseas intervention. For two decades after Vietnam, we used few U.S. forces abroad and with caution. 9/11 changed that, but as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars became the two longest wars in U.S. history, Americans shied away from further military involvement. The U.S. public, Congress, and Obama administration were divided and hesitant over further intervention in the Middle East.

* 1. **The United States in a Dangerous World**

Foreign policy is one of the most difficult areas of governance because we have to consider not only our own abilities and preferences but also those of dozens of other states. We can make two opposite errors, both related to the problem of misperception. First, we can underestimate the dangers we face or overestimate the importance of a region.

U.S. foreign policy faces a twin problem:

* a messy outside world that often defies our influence and
* an American people and government little interested in or equipped for putting this world in order.

Military power is sometimes necessary but should be used sparingly, as the aftermath of wars is often a power vacuum. Politicians, however, often like to sound decisive and bold in advocating military solutions.

The biggest long-term problem now is a rapidly rising China Some International Relation theorists argue that rising powers must collide with other powers, usually resulting in war. The trick to avoid this seems to be to make an agreement in advance over who has what.

Currently Beijing defines its national interest as economic growth and is reluctant to do anything that disrupts it: this explains why China claims Taiwan, why it is cautious about letting its currency rise, and why it lines up energy and raw materials deals around the globe.