

## The International System

## Anarchy

➤ **The realist, liberal, and constructivist paradigms all assume anarchy is a factor in international politics**

❑ For realists, especially neorealists, anarchy leads to a system of self-help, in which states must act on their own narrow self-interest and search for relative power or gains in relation to other states.

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## Anarchy

❑ For liberals, in particular neoliberal institutionalists, anarchy is not incompatible with extensive, institutionalized governance arrangements.

❑ That is, it is possible to mitigate anarchy by international institutions and regimes.

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## Anarchy

❑ For most critical theorists, “anarchy is what states make of it”.

❑ To sum up, anarchy is a state in which states, nation states or sovereignty states, exist. Anarchy means there is no governmental authority among or above states; it does not mean the international system is chaotic, unordered, or violent.

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## The Notion of a System

➤ **A system is an assemblage of units, objects, or parts united by some form of regular interaction.**

- ❑ units
- ❑ interaction of units
- ❑ recurrent ways of interaction
- ❑ boundary
- ❑ change
- EG: our class, international politics

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## The Notion of a System

➤ **Each theoretical perspective describes an international system.**

- ❑ For realists and radicals, the concept of an international system is vital to analysis.
- ❑ For liberals, the international system is less consequential as an explanatory mechanism (focus being more on interaction).
- ❑ For constructivists, the international system is a social construction, in which structure (“culture”) and agents mutually constitute each other.

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### The International System according to Realists

- All realists characterize the international system as anarchic.
  - ❑ No authority exists above the state; the state is sovereign.
  - ❑ This anarchic structure constrains the actions of decision-makers and affects the distribution of capabilities among the various actors.



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### The International System according to Realists

- Realists differ among themselves, however, about the degree of a state's autonomy in the international system.
  - ❑ Traditional realists acknowledge that states act and shape the system, whereas neorealists believe that states are constrained by the structure of system.
  - ❑ Yet for both, anarchy is given, it is the basic ordering principle.



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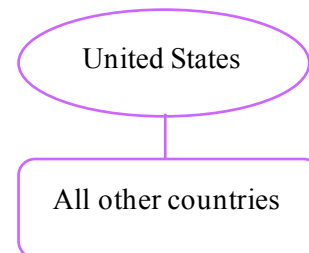
### The International System according to Realists

- **Polarity**
  - ❑ Polarity is any of the various ways in which power is distributed within the international system
  - ❑ It refers to the number of major powers (poles) that exert power in the international system.
  - ❑ There are three types of system polarity: unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity.



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#### Unipolar system: The post-Cold War era



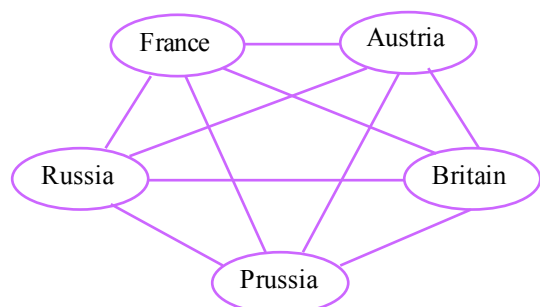
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#### Bipolar system: The Cold War era



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#### Multipolar system: 19c balance of power



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## The International System according to Realists

### ➤ How the International System Changes?

- ❑ Changes in the actors and hence the distribution of power
- ❑ Changes emanating from outside of the system

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## The International System according to Realists

### ➤ How the International System Changes?

- ❑ Changes in either the number of major actors or the relative power relationship among the actors may result in a fundamental change in the international system.

- EG: World War II
- Uneven development among states
  - Gilpin: differential growth of power

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## The International System according to Realists

### ➤ How the International System Changes?

- ❑ Exogenous changes may also lead to a shift in the international political system.
- EG: advances in technology—the instruments for oceanic navigation, the airplane for transoceanic crossings, and satellites and rockets for exploration of outer space

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### PARADIGM IN BRIEF

#### The Realist Perspective on the International System

Characterization	Anarchic
Actors	State is primary actor
Constraints	Polarity
Possibility of change	Slow change when the balance of power shifts

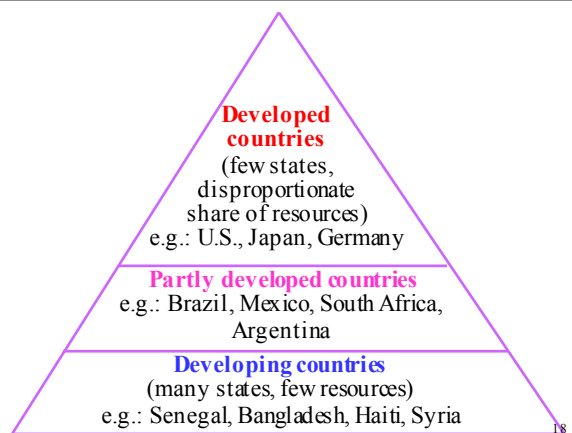
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## The International System according to Radicals

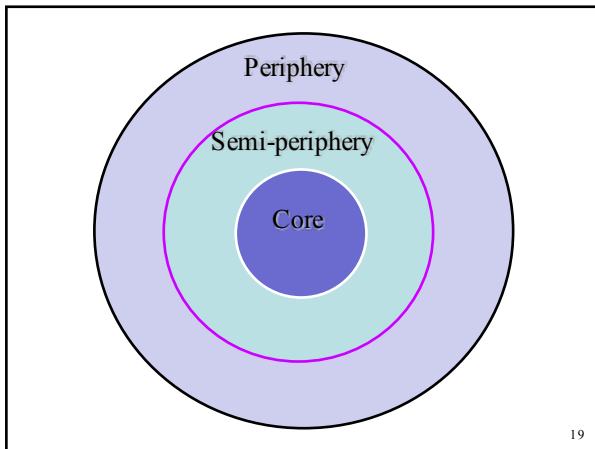
### ➤ Stratification

- ❑ Stratification refers to the uneven distribution of resources among different groups of states.
- ❑ The international system is stratified according to which states have vital resources, such as oil or military strength or economic power.

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## The International System according to Radicals

### ➤ Capitalism

- ❑ Stratification is caused by capitalism.
- ❑ Capitalism structures the relationship between the advantaged and the disadvantaged, empowering the rich and disenfranchising the weak.
- International institutions
- Multinational corporations

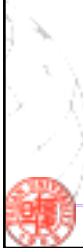


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## The International System according to Radicals

### ➤ Change of the capitalist system

- ❑ The shuffling of the states at the core of the system: the Dutch - the British - the Americans.
- ❑ Change of relative state positions in the semi-periphery and periphery.
- ❑ Cycles of growth and expansion followed by periods of contraction and decline.



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### PARADIGM IN BRIEF

#### The Radical Perspective on the International System

Characterization	Highly stratified
Actors	Capitalist states vs. developing states
Constraints	Stratification; capitalism
Possibility of change	Radical change needed but limited by the capitalist structure

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## The International System according to Liberals

### ➤ The international system is seen less as a structure and more as a process of interaction.

- ❑ 1) An interdependent system
  - Multiple channels connecting states
  - Multiple issues with no hierarchy
  - The use of military force generally avoided



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## The International System according to Liberals

### ➤ The international system is seen less as a structure and more as a process of interaction.

- ❑ 2) An international society ('English School')
  - Common rules, common institutions, and common interests
  - A common identity, a sense of "we-ness"
  - An arena and process for positive interactions



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## The International System according to Liberals

- The international system is seen less as a structure and more as a process of interaction.
  - ❑ 3) Anarchy
    - Each state acts in its own self-interest.
    - Unlike many realists, liberals see the product of the interaction among actors as a potentially positive one, where institutions created out of self-interest serve to moderate state behavior.

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## The International System according to Liberals

- Change in the international system
  - ❑ Rise of new actors.
  - ❑ Changes in the relative importance of different issue areas.
  - ❑ Changes in the social norms of a system.
    - EG: non-use of nuclear weapons
    - humanitarian intervention
  - ❑ Exogenous technological developments: e.g. communication and transportation.

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### PARADIGM IN BRIEF

#### The Liberal Perspective on the International System

Characterization	Interdependence, international society, and anarchy
Actors	States, non-state actors
Constraints	Competition and reciprocity
Possibility of change	No radical change; incremental change

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## Advantages and Disadvantages of the International System as a Level of Analysis

- Advantages
  - ❑ Provides comprehensive explanations.
  - ❑ Allows comparison between systems.
  - ❑ Serves as a significant research tool – a holistic, or top-down, approach.

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## Advantages and Disadvantages of the International System as a Level of Analysis

- Disadvantages
  - ❑ Neglects the “stuff” of politics.
  - ❑ Tends to sweeping generalizations (which are difficult to test).
  - ❑ Suffers from lack of specific historical information.
  - ❑ Has the problem of boundaries.

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## In Sum

- Realists and radicals pay the most attention to the international system level of analysis.
  - ❑ For realists, the defining characteristic of the international system is polarity.
  - ❑ For radicals, it is stratification.
  - ❑ To both, the international system constrains states.

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## In Sum

- ❑ Yet for realists the constraint might be a positive one (preventing states from engaging in aggressive activity) depending on whether the system is unipolar, bipolar or multipolar.
- ❑ While for radicals the constraint is a negative one—preventing economically depressed states from achieving equity.
- ❑ Preservation of the status quo is the goal of realists, whereas major system change is the goal of radicals.

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## In Sum

- ❑ Liberals, by contrast, see the international system as a way to conceptualize various interactions above and beyond the level of the state.
- ❑ For liberals, the international system is seen in a positive light, as an arena and context for interaction, which due to increasing interdependence incites states toward cooperation.

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