

## Realism, Neorealism and Neoclassical Realism

## Pedigree of the Realist Paradigm

### ➤ Paradigm?

- ❑ Paradigm means an example, a model, or an essential pattern.
- ❑ A paradigm structures thoughts about an area of inquiry. (Thomas Khun)
  - characteristics of the subject
  - puzzles that need to be solved
  - analytic criteria

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## Pedigree of the Realist Paradigm

- **Paradigm:** Dominant way of looking at a particular subject; structured patterns of inquiry and interpretation.
- **Theory:** Set of hypotheses postulating relationships between variables; used to describe, explain, and predict; must be falsifiable and stand the test of time.

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Thucydides (5bc)→Machiavelli (16c)→Hobbes (17c)

REALISM (1930s)

Traditionalism (1950s)

Neorealism (1970s)

Defensive Neorealism (1990s)

Offensive Neorealism (1990s)

Neoclassical Realism (1990s)

## Philosophical Underpinnings of Realism

- **Thucydides: History of the Peloponnesian War**
  - ❑ “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”
  - ❑ “Of gods we trust and of men we know, it is in their nature to rule whenever they can.”
  - ❑ “What made war inevitable was the growth of the Athenian power and the fear that this caused in Sparta.”
  - ❑ “So far as right and wrong are concerned...there is no difference between the two...”

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## Philosophical Underpinnings of Realism

- Machiavelli (1469-1527)
  - ❑ **The Prince**
- Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)
  - ❑ **Leviathan**

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## Theoretical Assumptions

### ➤ At the individual level

- ❑ People are primarily selfish and ethically flawed and compete for personal advantage.
- ❑ People have an instinctive lust for power.
- ❑ Eradicating this instinct is not possible.
- ❑ Human nature is plain bad and does not change in the course of time.
- **Neorealism abandons this assumption.**

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## Theoretical Assumptions

### ➤ At the state level

- ❑ The States are the central, unitary, and rational actors in IR.
- Central means states are the most important, primary, principle actors.
- Unitary means states share similar characters and functions.
- Rational means states make decisions by weighing national interests.

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## Theoretical Assumptions

### ➤ At the state level

- ❑ States pursue interests, in an anarchic setting where the real possibility of war must be accounted for.
- ❑ States are autonomous, neither the sum of individual interests à la liberalism, nor the implicit or explicit representative of certain privileged interests within society as assumed in Marxism.

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## Theoretical Assumptions

### ➤ At the state level

- ❑ States pursue power.
- ❑ The acquisition and possession of power are central to states and to international politics. International politics is thus power politics.

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## Theoretical Assumptions

### ➤ At the state level

- ❑ States pursue security.
- ❑ States are responsible for the provision of their own security.
- ❑ States are responsible for the good life of their citizens and the latter's security and survival is the ultimate national interest.

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## Theoretical Assumptions

### ➤ At the international system level

- ❑ The nature of the international system is anarchical and the structure of the international system is determined by the distribution of power among states.
- The ordering principle: Anarchy
- Functional differentiation of units: Like units
- The distribution of power/capabilities across the units

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## Theoretical Hypotheses

### ➤ Self-Help and Relative vs. Absolute Gains

- ❑ Self-help is the most important feature of the international system and the most important principle of states' behavior.
- ❑ The prime obligation of the state is promoting the national interest.
- ❑ The prime national interest is security
- ❑ States care more about relative gains than absolute gains.

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## Theoretical Hypotheses

### ➤ Realpolitik

- ❑ States should be prepared for war in order to preserve peace.
- ❑ The anarchical international system pushes states to acquire military power.
- ❑ The dominant concern for national security makes military power more important than economics.
- ❑ Insecurity leads states to arm, but competitive armament creates more insecurity (security dilemma).

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## Theoretical Hypotheses

### ➤ Competition and Conflict

- ❑ Competition and conflict among states are the norm.
- ❑ Greed/evil/aggression and tragedy

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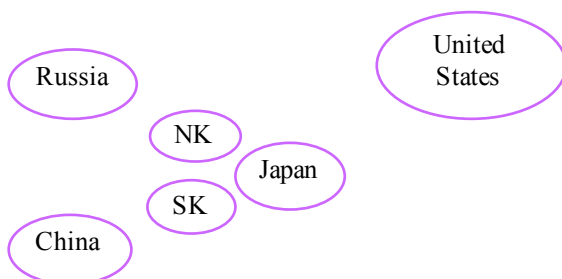
## Theoretical Hypotheses

### ➤ The security dilemma

- ❑ The (defensive) measures taken to preserve one state's security makes others feel insecure, inspiring them to respond with their own (defensive) measures, making the initial state feel insecure, and so on.

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## Example of the SD: Northeast Asia



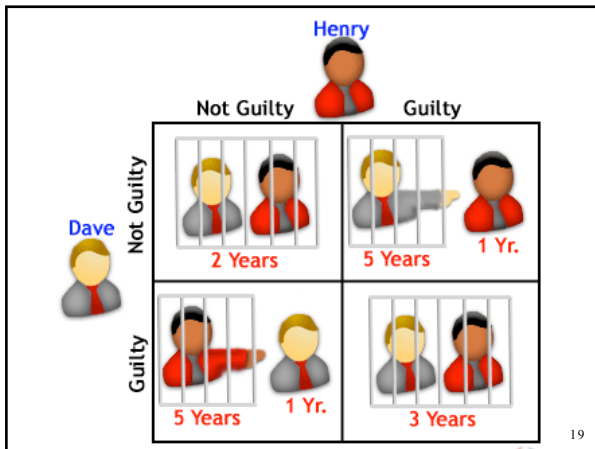
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## Theoretical Hypotheses

### ➤ Cooperation

- ❑ International cooperation is difficult.
  - ❑ The problem of collective action
    - uncertainty of intentions
    - incredibility of commitments
- “stag-hunt” game  
→ “prisoner’s dilemma”

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The Prisoner's Dilemma (General case)

		Actor 1	
		C	D
		Cooperate	Defect
Actor 2	C	3, 3 (P)	1, 4
	D	4, 1	2, 2 (N)
		Cooperate	Defect

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➤ Stag Hunt (Assurance, Coordination)

		Actor B	
		C	D
Actor A	C	4, 4 (P, N)	0, 2
	D	2, 0	2, 2 (N)
		Stag	Hare

C = Stag; D = Hare

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### Theoretical Hypotheses

➤ **Balancing vs. Bandwagoning**

- ❑ Balancing is more common than bandwagoning.
- Balancing means aligning with the weaker side against the strong.
- Bandwagoning means joining the stronger side.

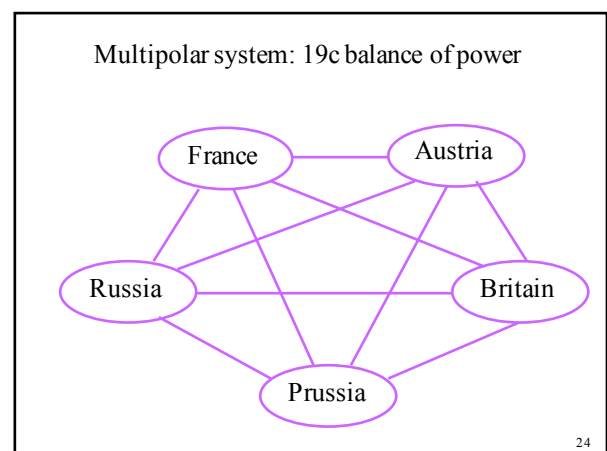
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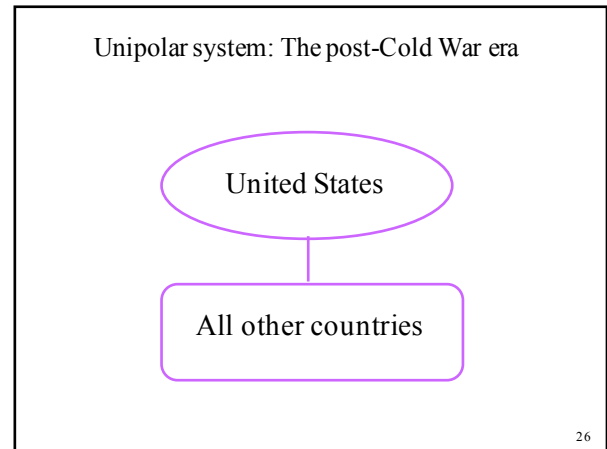
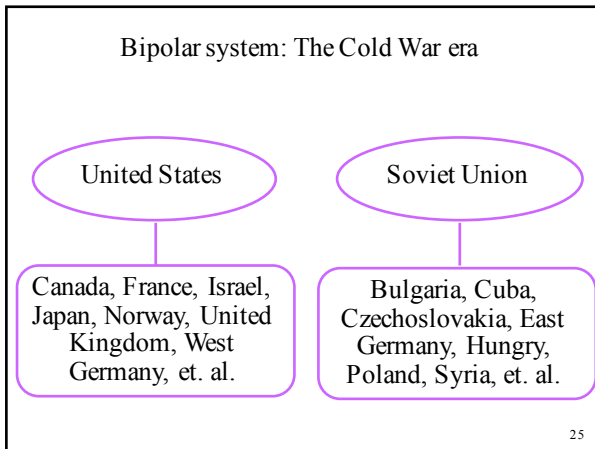
### Theoretical Hypotheses

➤ **The Polarity Debate**

- ❑ International stability depends on the distribution of states' power.
- ❑ But, which type of polarity— multipolar, bipolar, or unipolar — is the most stable, i.e. capable of preventing large-scale international war?

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**WHAT KIND OF POLARITY IS EMERGING AT PRESENT?**

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**Theoretical Hypotheses**

➤ **Emulation**

- ❑ Emulation is common.
- ❑ Over the long-run, states copy the successful military, economic, and organizational policies of leading states.

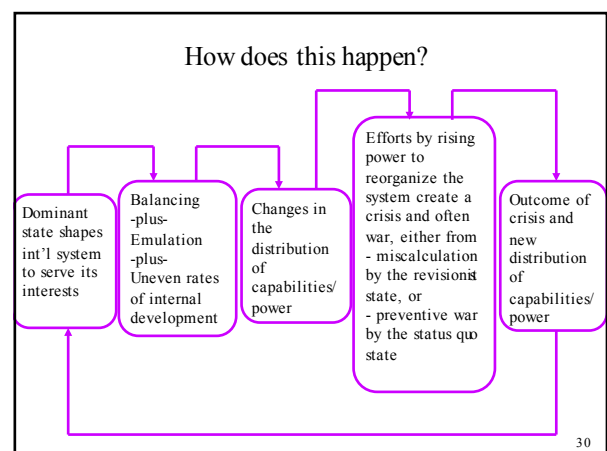
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**Theoretical Hypotheses**

➤ **Power Transition and Systemic Change**

- ❑ In the long run, the international system will change with the transition of the power balance among major states.
- ❑ The potential of power transition is low and the process of structural change is slow.

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## Variants of realism

- Classical realism: Morgenthau
- Neorealism (structural realism):
  - ❑ Defensive (neo)realism: Waltz
  - ❑ Offensive (neo)realism: Mearsheimer
- Neoclassical realism
  - ❑ Balance of threat: Walt
  - ❑ Balance of interest: Schweller

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## Variants of realism

- **Morgenthau and classical realism**
  - ❑ Six principles of political realism
    1. Politics is rooted in a permanent and unchanging human nature.
    2. Politics is an autonomous sphere of action and cannot be reduced to economics or morals.
    3. Self-interest is a basic fact of the human condition.

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## Variants of realism

4. The ethics of international relations is a political or situational ethics which is very different from private morality.
5. Realists are therefore opposed to the idea that particular nations can impose their ideologies on other nations.
6. Statecraft is a pragmatic activity that involves a profound awareness of the human limitations and imperfections.

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## Variants of realism

- **Waltz and Neorealism (defensive realism/ neorealism)**
  - ❑ The structure of international politics
  - ❑ Mechanism of balance of power
  - ❑ The difficulty of international cooperation because of anarchy and relative gain concerns

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## Variants of realism

- **Mearsheimer and offensive realism/neorealism**
  - ❑ The structure of international politics: No central authority able to enforce a protective mechanism.
  - ❑ States always have some offensive capability.
  - ❑ States can never be certain about the intentions of other states.
  - ❑ States want as much power as they can get
    - Regional hegemony
    - Off-shore balancing
  - ❑ This leads to a genuinely tragic situation.

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## Variants of realism

- **Walt and neoclassical realism**
  - ❑ **'balance of threat' theory**
  - ❑ Waltz's balance of power theory only looks at capabilities.
  - ❑ Such an approach does not pass the test of diplomatic history.
  - ❑ Capabilities are insufficient indicators.
  - ❑ What makes the difference is the strength of the threat.

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## Variants of realism

### ➤ Walt and Neoclassical realism

#### ❑ Determinants of threat

- ✓ Capacities
- ✓ Distance
- ✓ Offensive potential
- ✓ Perception of offensive intentions

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## Variants of realism

### ➤ Schweller and Neoclassical realism

#### ❑ 'balance of interest' theory

#### ❑ Neorealism has a status quo bias.

#### ❑ States not only form alliances in the face of threats, they also form alliance to obtain certain gains, to expand their power.

#### ❑ status quo states: relative power (Waltz)

#### ❑ revisionist states: absolute power/hegemony (Morgenthau, Mearsheimer)

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### Example of incorporating disposition: Balance of Interest Theory

<u>Lions</u>	<u>Lambs</u>	<u>Jackals</u>	<u>Wolves</u>
Strong SQ states	Weak SQ states	Weak revisionist states	Strong revisionist states
Self-preservation and preserve SQ	Do Whatever is Necessary to survive	Self-extension (limited aims)	Self-extension (unlimited aims)
Balance or buck-passing	Appeasement; Wave-of-the future bandwagoning; Distancing	Jackal bandwagoning (opportunists)	Risk acceptant aggression

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## Neoclassical realism

- It is not a reassertion of the primacy of human nature as a causal factor in explaining the aggression of states over and above the structural account of anarchy.
- Rather, it attempts to combine structure under conditions of anarchy with relevant factors arising from the internal dynamics of states, including ideology, personalities, perceptions, misperceptions and other factors that feed into foreign policy.

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## Neoclassical realism

- Anarchy gives states considerable latitude in defining their security interests
- The relative distribution of power only sets parameters for grand strategies
- International structure (anarchy and distribution of power) constrain states but it does not dictate leadership policies and actions
- Domestic politics can make a difference
- A combination of classical realist and neorealist – particularly defensive realist – theories.

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## Neoclassical realism

- It is, in effect,
  - ❑ the joining of foreign policy analysis with structural realism (neorealism),
  - ❑ as well as a combination of classical realism and neorealism – particularly defensive realism.

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## Neoclassical realism

- Assumes that the actions of a state in the international system can be explained by
  - 1.intervening systemic variables – such as the distribution of power among states
  - 2.cognitive variables – such as the perception and misperception of systemic pressures, other states' intentions, or threats
  - 3.domestic variables – such as state institutions, elites, and societal actors
- All affect the power and freedom of action of the decision-makers in foreign policy.

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## Neoclassical realism

- Holds true to the structural argument of neorealism (anarchy and balance of power).
- However it adds that states' mistrust and inability to perceive one another accurately, or state leaders' inability to mobilize state power and public support can result in underbalancing behaviour leading to imbalances within the international system, the rise and fall of great powers, and war.

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## Different modes of balancing

- **Appropriate balancing:** a state correctly perceives another state's intentions and balances accordingly.
- **Inappropriate balancing or overbalancing:** a state incorrectly perceives another state as threatening, and mobilizes more resources than it needs to in order to balance. This causes an imbalance.

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## Different modes of balancing

- **Underbalancing:** a state fails to balance, out of either inefficiency or incorrectly perceiving a state as less of threat than it actually is. This causes an imbalance.
- **Nonbalancing:** a state avoids balancing through buck passing or bandwagoning. A state may choose to do this for a number of reasons, including an inability to balance.

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### PARADIGM IN BRIEF

#### The Realist Paradigm

Key units of analysis	States, international structure
View of the Individual	(for classical realism) Power seeking; selfish; antagonistic
View of the state	Power seeking; unitary and rational actor; sovereign
View of the international system	Anarchic; self-help; structured by the distribution of states' capabilities/power; low change potential; slow structural change
Core concerns	War and security; power and national interests; competition and relative gains

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### PARADIGM IN BRIEF

#### The Realist Paradigm

Major features of international politics	Self-help; balance of power; deterrence
Policy prescriptions	Increase national power; preserve nuclear deterrence; avoid disarmament and super-national organizations
Central concepts	Anarchy; power; security; interest; polarity; structure; sovereignty
Major theorists	Morgenthau, Waltz, Gilpin, Mearsheimer, Walt

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## In Sum: Contributions and Limitations

### ➤ Contributions

- ❑ Theoretically, it offers important and unique insights into the essential characteristics of international politics.
- It develops a theory of international politics and presents a parsimonious (neorealism) and coherent explanation of international politics.

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## In Sum: Contributions and Limitations

### ➤ Contributions

- It provides a very useful framework for analysis, raises key questions and problems deserving further study, and offers a relevant research methodology.
- ❑ Practically, it provides pragmatic guidelines for decision makers.

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## In Sum: Contributions and Limitations

### ➤ Limitations

- ❑ Theoretically, it lacks comprehensive explanation and rich description of IR (this holds less for neoclassical realism).
- It overlooks the importance of non-state actors, minimizes differences among states, and turns a blind eye on domestic politics (this holds less for neoclassical realism).
- Its key concepts and hypotheses are poorly specified.

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## In Sum: Contributions and Limitations

Defining power is difficult.

Rank	Country	GDP (purchasing power parity)	Rank	Country	Strategic Warheads	Rank	Country	Oil - exports (bbl/day)
1	European Union	\$ 14,450,000,000,000	1	USA	5,521	1	Saudi Arabia	6,900,000
2	United States	\$ 13,840,000,000,000	2	Russia	5,682	2	European Union	6,971,000
3	China	\$ 7,043,000,000,000	3	France	348	3	Russia	5,080,000
4	Japan	\$ 4,417,000,000,000	4	UK	185	4	Norway	3,018,000
5	India	\$ 2,965,000,000,000	5	China	~130	5	United Arab Emirates	2,540,000
6	Russia	\$ 2,976,000,000,000	6	Israel	100-200	6	Iran	2,510,000
7	Brazil	\$ 1,678,000,000,000	7	Canada	~50	7	Canada	2,274,000
8	Mexico	\$ 1,353,000,000,000	8	India	~50	8	Mexico	2,268,000
9	Canada	\$ 1,274,000,000,000	9	Pakistan	~60	9	Venezuela	2,203,000
10	Korea, South	\$ 1,206,000,000,000				10	Kuwait	2,200,000

What factors make a state powerful? The three tables above list the top 10 states (including the EU as a single state) in three different categories that might be used to assess power.

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## In Sum: Contributions and Limitations

### Measures of Power



The Venn diagram shows which states are in the top ten in one, two and three categories. What does this kind of analysis show us? What does it obscure? What other categories might be used to assess power? Are the different categories of equal importance? All these questions complicate efforts to assess the role of power in international politics.

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## In Sum: Contributions and Limitations

### ➤ Limitations

- It contains theoretical dilemmas related to the agent-structure problem: impact of structure on states vs impact of states on structure.
- ❑ Practically, the realist paradigm is at odds with some historical events, especially the end of the Cold War.

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