International Relations Theory

A realizmus.
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Elements of Realism

1. Pessimistic view of human nature
2. International relations are necessarily conflictual and conflicts are ultimately resolved by war
3. Basic values: national security and state survival
4. Scepticism about progress.
Basic Vocabulary of Realism

1. Power politics
2. Anarchy
3. **State** is the pre- eminent factor
4. International **hierarchy of power** among states (relative power)
5. Value preference: **security and state survival**
6. **Political ethics**: based on maximizing national interests. Statecraft is only responsible morally towards its citizens.
7. Primarily struggle between the great powers for **domination** and **security**
8. No progress
Strands of Realism

**Classical realism**
(human nature)
- Thucydides (c. 430-406 BC): The Peloponnesian War
- Machiavelli (1532): The Prince
- Hobbes (1651): Leviathan

**Neorealism**
(international system)
- Rousseau (c. 1750): The State of War

**Neoclassical realism**
- Morgenthau (1948): Politics among Nations
- Zakaria (1998): From Wealth to Power

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- Mearsheimer (2001): Tragedy of Great Power Politics
Thucydides: The Peloponnesian War

- 431-404 BC
- ‘great powers’ and ‘lesser powers’
- ‘The man is a political animal’ (Aristoteles)
- Political animals are highly unequal in their powers and capabilities (Thucydides)
- Adaptation to the circumstances
- ‘Political ethics’ vs ‘private morality’
- Foresight, prudence, caution and judgement are characteristics of political ethics
The Melian Dialogue (lessons)
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1. Principle of justice vs. **justice in international relations**: not an equal treatment for all, but knowing your proper place.
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3. ‘It is a general and necessary law of nature to rule whatever one can’
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2. ‘By conquering you we shall increase not only the size but the security of our empire.’

3. ‘It is a general and necessary law of nature to rule whatever one can’

4. ‘...if one follows one’s self interest one wants to be safe, whereas the path of justice and honour involves one in danger...’

‘This is the safe rule - to stand up to one’s equals, to behave with deference to one’s superiors, and to treat one’s inferiors with moderation.’
The Melian Dialogue (lessons)

1. Normative vs. power system
2. Cost-benefit analysis
3. Risk assessment
4. Face saving vs. safe rule
Machiavelli: The Prince

- **Values**: national freedom, survival
- **The world**: dangerous and by the same token opportune place
- **The prince**: power (the Lion) and deception (the Fox)
- Seek the advantages to defend the interests
- Recognize and exploit opportunities
- Be quicker and more skillful than others
- **Ethics**: conducting Christian ethics in international relations is irresponsible. Fundamental values are the security and the survival of the state.
Machiavelli: The Prince

- Maxims
  1. Be aware of what is happening.
  2. Do not wait for things to happen.
  3. Anticipate the motives and actions of others.
  4. Do not wait for others to act. Act before they do. Ward off any threat posed by your neighbours. (Be pre-emptive)
Machiavelli: The Prince

- Sometimes portrayed as ‘manuals on how to thrive in a completely chaotic and immoral world’.
- But...
Hobbes: Leviathan

'State of nature' = 'permanent 'state of war’ ‘of every man against every man' (constant fear)

Escape route

Creation and maintenance of a sovereign state

International state of nature
**International state of nature:** this is a permanent condition of actual or potential war between sovereign states. War is necessary, as a last resort, for resolving disputes between states that cannot agree and will not acquiesce. Human society and morality is confined to the state and does not extend into international relations, which is a political arena of considerable turmoil, discord and conflict between states in which the great powers dominate anybody else.
What Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes have in common?

1. Human condition
2. Body of political knowledge
3. There are no permanent or final solutions to the problems of politics
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Morgenthau’s six principles

2. Politics is an autonomous sphere of action (cannot be reduced to economics or to morals).
4. Political or situational ethics. Far heavier responsibilities than a private citizen.
5. Particular nations cannot impose their ideologies on other nations.
6. Statecraft is a sober and uninspiring activity that involves a profound awareness of human limitations and human imperfections.
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Schelling and Strategic Realism

• **Nobel Prize** in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel (2005), “for having enhanced our understanding of conflict and cooperation through game-theory analysis"

• **Focus**: foreign policy decision making,
• How statespeople can deal rationally with the threat and dangers of nuclear war?
• How to employ power intelligently to get our military adversary to do what we desire and to avoid doing what we fear

• **About diplomacy**: bargaining, a rational-instrumental activity, some common interest is basic

• **About war**: “war and the brink of war is more a contest of nerve and risktaking”
Schelling and Strategic Realism

- **Important distinction between brute force and coercion:** ‘between taking what you want and making someone give it to you’
- ‘we need to know what an adversary treasures and what scares him’
- Importance of communication (idea of establishing a hotline between the White House and the Kreml)
- **Schelling point** (also called focal point) is a solution that people will tend to use in the absence of communication, because it seems natural, special or relevant to them
- ‘Meager’ nuclear attack is like being a ‘little bit’ pregnant
- Where are the values?
**Definition**

**Strategic realism:** this theory is developed by Thomas Schelling analyses how a state can employ power to get a rival to do what the state desires, i.e. through coercion instead of brute force, which is always dangerous and inefficient. Unlike classical and neoclassical realism, strategic realism does not make normative claims; values are taken as given and not weighed during analysis. Rather, the theory seeks to provide analytical tools for diplomacy and foreign policy, which are seen to be instrumental activities that can be understood via game theoretical analysis.
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Structural Realism (Neorealism)

- Kenneth Waltz: *Theory of International Politics* (1979)
- Simple theory explaining ‘few big important things’
- Focus on the structure
  - Anarchy (and hierarchy in domestic politics)
  - International system is composed of like units
  - The only thing that matters is relative power
- Great powers will always tend to **balance** each other
- Smaller and weaker states will have a tendency to align themselves with great powers in order to preserve the maximum **autonomy**
- States are **power-seeking** and **security-conscious** because the structure of the international system compels them to be that way
Bipolar vs Multipolar System

- Bipolar is more stable, because...
  - Number of great power conflicts are fewer
  - Easier to operate a deterrence system
  - The chances of miscalculation and misadventure are lower

- Future of Europe by Mearsheimer
Case Study: NATO Expansion
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a system of collective defence whereby its member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party
Case Study: NATO Expansion
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### Case Study: NATO Expansion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reinforce democratic reforms</td>
<td>• Place in doubt the entire post-Cold War settlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>• civil and democratic control over military forces</td>
<td>• Expansion into the former Soviet sphere of influence</td>
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<td>• patterns and habits of cooperation</td>
<td>• might unite nationalist and xenophobic forces in Russia</td>
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<td>• promoting good-neighbourly relations</td>
<td>• Draw a deep line of division in the region between NATO</td>
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<td>• Increase transparency in military budgets</td>
<td>• and non-NATO members</td>
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<td>• Reinforce closer integration and cooperation in Europe</td>
<td>• Reduce the alliance’s credibility to defend without</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Strengthen the alliance’s ability to contribute to European security</td>
<td>exception any member in the event of an attack</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Deter Russia from engaging in territorial revisionism</td>
<td>• Put in jeopardy the United States’ commitment to the</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Restrain Russia’s European neighbours</td>
<td>alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Forestall East-European states from searching security outside the alliance</td>
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<td>• Would not tempt the united Germany to play more independent security role in the region</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pre-empt any plans and actions by Russia</td>
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<td>(unilateralism would decrease, consultation increase)</td>
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<td>• Without expansion situation would be worse...</td>
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- What makes the difference?
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What makes the difference?
- Judgements and assessments: each side assesses opportunity and risk differently and the role of responsible statecraft in NATO expansion
Defensive vs Offensive Realism

1. Waltz - **Defensive Realism** ('ultimate concern is not for power, but for security')

2. Mearsheimer - **Offensive Realism**
- The structure of the system compels states to maximize their relative power position
- Basic principle: self-help
- All states possess offensive military capacity
- Great deal of uncertainty about the intentions of others: no satisfied or status quo states
- Best path to peace is to maximize power
- Ideal position: global hegemony. But it is impossible according to Mearsheimer perpetual great power competition
- States can only become regional hegemons (e.g. United States in the Western hemisphere for almost two centuries - Monroe Doctrine (1823))
- USA as a great power has tried to ensure that no regional hegemon emerges in Europe or in Asia, because that would have threaten USA's regional hegemon status
**Defensive realism**: according to Kenneth Waltz’s theory, a ‘defensive realist’ recognizes that states seek power for security and survival, but striving for excessive power is counterproductive because it provokes hostile alliances by other states.
**Offensive realism**: a theory developed by John Mearsheimer, in contrast with ‘defensive realism’. Great powers, according to his theory, are perpetually seeking ways to gain power over their rivals, towards the ultimate goal of hegemony.
Realist Critique of the US Foreign Policy

• War with Iraq is Not in America’s National Interest
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Neoclassical Realism

• Bring individual and unit variation back to theory
• **Perceptions of state leaders**: there is no objective reading of the distribution of power (Schweller, 1996)
• **Motivation of states**, no similar set of interests: status quo and revisionist states (e.g. Germany after and before the WW II) (Morgenthau, Kissinger)
• **State-society relationships, state-strength**: ability to extract and direct resources from the societies that they rule (Zakaria, 1998) (States are not ‘like units’.)
Emancipatory Theory: a Critique of Realism
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- Kantian categorical imperative in the heart of the theory: ‘treat people as end not means’ people always come first; states are merely tools
Research Prospects of Realism
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  5. World after 9/11
Globalization and Realism

- Did economic interdependence make war less likely?
- Globalization is fundamentally tied to Americanization
- 9/11 experience and the ‘cycle of violence’ in theory
- 9/11 is perceptively committed by a non-state actor, but the response was to attack territorial states...
- Waltz about 9/11: ‘business as usual’, the coalition of willing is ‘mile wide’, but only an ‘inch deep’
- Realists against war!!! ‘War with Iraq is Not in America’s National Interest’ (NYT advert, Realism Council, 34 realist thinkers including Mearsheimer and Walt)
- US casualties, significant civilian deaths, heightened risk of terrorism, increased hatred on the USA in the Arab and Islamic world, and weakened ability to contain the rising threat from China
Globalization and Realism

- Rudimentary transnational governance is possible, but at the same time it is entirely dependent on power distribution.
- State is not going to be eclipsed; nationalism remains a potent force in world politics.

Reasons why the 21st century will be a realist century?
- Human rights are mostly seen as nothing more than a Western idea backed by economic dollars and military ‘divisions’.
- If China continues to grow, it will reach the level of the USA in 2020, and realism leads us to predict that Western norms of individual rights and responsibilities will be under threat.

- The West, rather than being liberal (i.e., transforming the global politics on its own image), may need to become more realist in order for its traditions and values to survive the twenty-first century.