

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: POLITICS, POWER, AND GLOBAL CONNECTIONS



Robert Stockwell
De Anza College

De Anza - POLI 3A

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About the Book

This textbook is the product of the Political Science Department at De Anza College. It is designed to provide the basis for a quarter-long introductory course in International Relations for an undergraduate, community college student audience.

It is based on Jill Kirkham's, [International Relations: Introduction Essentials \(CC BY-NC 4.0\)](#), which is an AI-generated text sourced from the best open-source textbooks available: Stephen McGlinchey, ed. [International Relations](#) and Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters and Christian Scheinpflug, eds. [International Relations Theory](#).

If you are like us, you might struggle with the idea of an AI-generated textbook. At the end of the day, when you consider the range of options out there, including the above-mentioned volumes, the Kirkham text has positive attributes. It is compact: it covers a lot of ground in a very small number of pages. It provides students with an introduction to the discipline in terms of IR theory, international institutions and processes, and global challenges.

Yet, its compactness has a downside. It lacks historical depth and analytical perspective. To address this weakness, we have included what we call "Deeper Dives" throughout, the original source chapters from McGlinchey, ed. [International Relations](#). We've also included ancillaries (learning objectives, glossaries, and discussion questions) and multiple choice questions (available through libretext for instructors only).

Finally, we think of the introductory IR class as an opportunity to promote students' research skills as well. For our Introduction to International Relations class, we require students to conduct a quarter-long policy paper. We ask students to first identify a major global challenge. Second, to analyze the history of that issue, identifying the three most important initiatives undertaken to address it and evaluating their impact, being sure to explain their relative success or failure. Third, and finally, we ask students to prescribe what must be done to successfully address the issue and to explain how and why their policy prescription can be realized.

At the end of the day, we decided to go ahead with Kirkham as the foundation for this introductory text knowing full well its strengths and weaknesses.

About the Author

Bob Stockwell is a retired De Anza College instructor. He taught courses in American, Comparative, International Relations, and Theory from 2004-2026.

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1: THE STUDY OF IR AND RECENT HISTORY

Introduction

The academic discipline of International Relations (IR) emerged in response to the need for a systematic study of global interactions, especially in the wake of significant historical events that reshaped the world order. A key historical milestone that laid the groundwork for the modern state system and, consequently, the study of IR was the Treaty of Westphalia. This treaty, along with subsequent developments, played a pivotal role in shaping the principles that continue to guide international relations today.

Learning Objectives

- Outline the major historical developments that have shaped the contemporary international system.
- Recognize the impact major historical developments have had on global politics and IR as a discipline.

- 1.1: The Treaty of Westphalia
- 1.2: Post World War I
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1.1: The Treaty of Westphalia

Introduction to the Treaty of Westphalia

The Treaty of Westphalia, signed in 1648, marked the end of the Thirty Years' War in Europe, one of the most destructive conflicts on the continent. This treaty is often regarded as the foundation of the modern international system because it established key principles that continue to influence the way states interact. The Treaty of Westphalia's significance cannot be overstated. It marked a shift from a world where empires, religions, and personal unions dominated to a system of sovereign states that recognize each other's autonomy. This new order set the stage for the development of international relations as a distinct field of study, as scholars sought to understand the dynamics of this emerging system of states.

One of the most significant outcomes of the Treaty of Westphalia was the recognition of state sovereignty. The treaty established the principle that each state had the authority to govern its own territory without external interference. This concept of territorial integrity became a cornerstone of international law and remains fundamental to the structure of international relations today. The Treaty of Westphalia is also credited with the formalization of the nation-state as the primary unit of political organization. Before the treaty, political authority in Europe was often fragmented, with overlapping claims of power by the church, monarchies, and local lords. The treaty helped to solidify the notion that the state, defined by clear territorial boundaries, was the central actor in international politics. The treaty laid the groundwork for modern diplomacy by establishing the idea that states should interact with one another as equal sovereign entities. This principle of equality among states, regardless of size or power, has become a key element of international diplomatic practice.

1.2: Post World War I

Developments Post World War I

The formal establishment of International Relations as an academic discipline can be traced back to the aftermath of World War I. The unprecedented scale of destruction and the loss of life during the war spurred a global movement to understand the causes of such conflicts and to prevent their recurrence. This period marked the beginning of IR as scholars and policymakers alike sought to create a more stable and peaceful international order. One of the most significant outcomes of World War I was the creation of the League of Nations in 1919. This international organization was established with the aim of maintaining peace and preventing future conflicts through collective security and diplomacy. The League represented an early attempt to institutionalize international cooperation and was a key focus for early IR scholars who studied its structure, functions, and challenges. It should be noted that the US did not join the League of Nations. The post-war period also saw the establishment of academic institutions dedicated to the study of International Relations. The first IR department was founded in 1919 at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, funded by a donation from industrialist David Davies. This marked the beginning of formalized IR education, which quickly spread to other universities, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States.

1.3: Interwar Period

Developments During the Interwar Period

During the interwar period, the study of International Relations expanded significantly. However, the discipline faced numerous challenges, including skepticism about the effectiveness of international institutions and the rise of authoritarian regimes that threatened global stability. The interwar years saw the emergence of academic journals and publications dedicated to the study of IR. These platforms provided a space for scholars to debate and discuss the pressing issues of the day, including the effectiveness of the League of Nations, the role of diplomacy, and the impact of economic policies on international stability. In an effort to prevent another world war, various global conferences were held during the interwar period, focusing on disarmament, economic cooperation, and conflict resolution. These conferences, although not always successful, were significant in shaping the direction of IR studies, as scholars analyzed their outcomes and the broader implications for international peace. Despite the efforts to maintain peace, the rise of fascism, militarism, and economic instability in the 1930s posed significant challenges to international cooperation. The failure of the League of Nations to prevent the aggression of Axis powers led to increased criticism and a re-evaluation of the principles guiding international relations at the time.

1.4: Post World War II

Developments Following World War II

The end of World War II marked a turning point in the development of International Relations as a discipline. The horrors of the war and the subsequent restructuring of the global order led to the institutionalization of IR studies and a significant expansion in both its academic scope and practical applications. In 1945, the United Nations (UN) was established as a successor to the League of Nations, with the goal of preventing another global conflict. The UN's formation was a key moment in the history of IR, as it provided a more robust framework for international cooperation and became a central focus of study for IR scholars. The geopolitical tensions of the Cold War had a profound impact on the study of International Relations. The division of the world into opposing blocs led to an increased focus on security studies, diplomacy, and the impact of nuclear weapons. During this period, IR became more institutionalized in universities, with new departments and research centers being established around the world. In the post-war period, IR academic programs proliferated, particularly in the United States and Europe. Universities established dedicated departments and institutes for the study of IR, reflecting the growing importance of the discipline in understanding global affairs. The expansion of academic programs also led to the development of specialized areas of study within IR, such as international law, international organizations, and global governance.

Bay Area Connections

San Francisco State University (SFSU) established the [first IR department](#) in the U.S. in 1946, a year after San Francisco hosted the conference that established the UN. The only department in the CSU system affiliated with the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs (APSIA), the SFSU IR program offers a Bachelor's and Masters of Arts, minors, certificates, and a host of area studies.

1.5: Late 20th Century

Developments During the Late 20th Century

As the 20th century progressed, the discipline of International Relations continued to diversify, responding to the changing dynamics of global politics, the rise of new actors, and the increasing complexity of international issues. The late 20th century saw the rise of new global challenges, including environmental degradation, human rights, and economic globalization. These issues broadened the scope of IR, leading scholars to explore how non-state actors, such as multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and terrorism influence international relations. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1991 were pivotal events that reshaped the global order and had a significant impact on the study of IR. The transition from a bipolar world to a more multipolar international system prompted a rethinking of many of the assumptions that had guided the discipline during the Cold War era. The increasing complexity of global issues led to the growth of interdisciplinary approaches within IR. Scholars began to incorporate insights from economics, sociology, environmental science, and other fields to better understand the multifaceted nature of international relations. This shift reflected the recognition that global issues often intersect with domestic politics, economics, and social dynamics.

1.6: 21st Century

Developments During the 21st Century

In the 21st century, the field of International Relations continues to evolve, driven by new challenges, technological advancements, and the changing landscape of global power. The rapid pace of globalization has brought both opportunities and challenges to the international system. Issues such as global trade, migration, and transnational terrorism have become central to the study of IR, as scholars seek to understand the implications of an increasingly interconnected world. The rise of digital technologies and the internet has transformed the way states interact and how power is exercised on the global stage. Cybersecurity, information warfare, and the role of social media in international relations are now critical areas of study within the discipline. The 21st century has also seen shifts in global power, with the rise of countries like China and India challenging the traditional dominance of Western powers. This shift has prompted a reevaluation of global governance structures and the role of emerging powers in shaping the future of international relations. As global challenges become more complex, there has been a growing emphasis on the need for effective global governance and multilateral cooperation. The role of international institutions, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, remains a key focus of IR studies as scholars examine their effectiveness in addressing global issues.

1.7: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

The discipline of International Relations has undergone significant transformations since its inception in the early 20th century. From its origins in the aftermath of the Treaty of Westphalia and World War I to its current focus on globalization, technology, and shifting power dynamics, IR has continually adapted to the changing realities of the international system. As the world continues to evolve, the study of IR will remain essential for understanding the complexities of global politics and for developing strategies to address the challenges of the 21st century and beyond.

Important Caveats: Eurocentrism and Colonialism

At the same time, it is important to recognize the mainstream discipline of International Relations is Eurocentric and modernist-centric. While it is true that world politics was significantly impacted by the Treaty of Westphalia and the normative, legal, and institutional structures that emerged over the decades, it is also the case that there was a world politics before Westphalia that had its own unique rhythms and dynamics. For a fascinating account of the history of politics in China and East Asia, India, the Muslim Caliphates, the Mongol Khanates, Africa, and the Americas, see Ringmar (2019).

Moreover, what is provided above does not adequately address the impact of Euro-American colonialism throughout the modern period, which had fundamental impacts on the development of the world system of states. For an overview of how European colonialism impacted the rest of the world, including Africa, Asia, and the Americas, and how European models of nationalism and statehood informed the decolonization process, read the next section, Ringmar's (2016) "Making of the Modern World."

1.8: Deeper Dive- Historical Background

Ringmar's "The Making of the Modern World"

International relations, as it is presented in the flow of daily news, concerns a large number of disparate events: leaders are meeting, negotiations are concluded, wars are started, acts of terror committed, and so on. In order to make sense of all this information we need to know a lot about the contemporary world and its history; we need to understand how all the disparate events hang together. At university, we study these topics, but it is a basic tenet of the academic study of international politics that this rather messy picture can be radically simplified. Instead of focusing on the flow of daily news, we focus on the basic principles underlying it. This is what we will try to do in this chapter. So, let us begin by thinking big: what is international relations, how was it made, and how did it come to be that way?

The state is a good place to start. There are a lot of states in the world – in fact, according to the latest count, there are no fewer than 195 of them. States are obviously very different from each other, but they are also similar to each other in important respects. All states are located somewhere, they have a territorial extension; they are surrounded by borders which tell us where one state ends and another begins. In fact, with the exception of Antarctica, there is virtually no piece of land anywhere on earth's surface that is not claimed by one state or another and there is no piece of land that belongs to more than one state (although, admittedly, the ownership of some pieces of land is disputed). Moreover, all states have their own capitals, armies, foreign ministries, flags and national anthems. All states call themselves 'sovereign', meaning that they claim the exclusive right to govern their respective territories in their own fashion. But states are also sovereign in relation to each other: they act in relation to other states, declaring war, concluding a peace, negotiating a treaty, and many other things. In fact, we often talk about states as though they were persons with interests to defend and plans to carry out. According to a time-honoured metaphor, we can talk about international politics as a 'world stage' on which the states are the leading actors.

Over the course of the years there have been many different kinds of states, yet this chapter is mainly concerned with the European state and with European developments. There are good reasons for this. For much of its history, Europe was of no particular relevance to the rest of the world. Europe had few connections to other continents and European states were not more powerful, and certainly no richer, than those elsewhere. But this began to change from around the year 1500. This was when the Europeans first developed extensive trading links with the rest of the world. That trade helped to spur both economic development and social change. As a result, the Europeans began to assert themselves. Eventually, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, European states occupied and colonised the bulk of the world, dramatically transforming the course of world history. Yet, as we will see, it was only when the colonised countries became independent in the twentieth century that the European state and the European way of organising international relations finally became the universal norm. Today's international system is, for good and for bad, made by Europeans and by non-Europeans copying European examples.

The rise of the sovereign state

In medieval Europe international politics consisted of a complicated pattern of overlapping jurisdictions and loyalties. Most of life was local and most political power was local too. At the local level there was an enormous diversity of political entities: feudal lords who ruled their respective estates much as they saw fit, cities made up of independent merchants, states ruled by clerics and smaller political entities such as principalities and duchies. There were even brotherhoods – such as the Knights Hospitaller, a military order – who laid claims to a political role. There were also, especially in northern Europe, many peasant communities that were more or less self-governing. There were kings too of course, such as the kings of France and England, but their power was limited and their poverty looked like wealth only in comparison with the conditions of the near-destitute members of the peasant class underneath them.

In medieval Europe there were two institutions with pretensions to power over the continent as a whole – the (Catholic) Church and the Empire. The Church was the spiritual authority, with its centre in Rome. Apart from a small Jewish minority, all Europeans were Christian and the influence of the Church spread far and penetrated deeply into people's lives. As the custodian, from Roman times, of institutions like the legal system and the Latin language, the Church occupied a crucial role in the cultural and intellectual life of the Middle Ages. The Empire – known as the *Holy Roman Empire* – was established in the tenth century in central, predominantly German-speaking, Europe. It also included parts of Italy, France and today's Netherlands and Belgium. It too derived legitimacy from the Roman Empire, but had none of its political power. The Holy Roman Empire is best compared to a loosely structured federation of many hundreds of separate political units.

The political system of medieval Europe was thus a curious combination of the local and the universal. Yet, from the fourteenth century onward this system was greatly simplified as the state emerged as a political entity located at an intermediate level between the local and the universal. The new states simultaneously set themselves in opposition to popes and emperors on the universal level, and to feudal lords, peasants and assorted other rulers on the local level. This is how the state came to make itself independent and self-governing. The process started in Italy where northern city-states such as Florence, Venice, Ravenna and Milan began playing the pope against the emperor, eventually making themselves independent of both. Meanwhile, in Germany, the pope struggled with the emperor over the issue of who of the two should have the right to appoint bishops. While the two were fighting it out, the constituent members of the Holy Roman Empire took the opportunity to assert their independence. This was also when the kings of France and England began acting more independently, defying the pope's orders. Between 1309 and 1377, the French even forced the pope to move to Avignon, in southern France. In England, meanwhile, the king repealed the pope's right to levy taxes on the people.

With the Reformation in the sixteenth century the notion of a unified Europe broke down completely as the Church began to split apart. Before long the followers of Martin Luther, 1483–1546, and John Calvin, 1509–1564, had formed their own religious denominations which did not take orders from Rome. Instead the new churches aligned themselves with the new states. Or rather, various kings, such as Henry VIII in England or Gustav Vasa in Sweden, took advantage of the religious strife in order to further their own political agendas. By supporting the Reformation, they could free themselves from the power of Rome. All over northern Europe, the new 'Protestant' churches became state-run and church lands became property of the state. Yet, the new divisions were cultural and intellectual too. With the invention of the printing press, power over the written word moved away from the monasteries and into the hands of private publishers who sought markets for their books. The biggest markets were found in books published not in Latin but in various local languages. From the early eighteenth century onwards Latin was no longer the dominant language of learning. As a result, it was suddenly far more difficult for Europeans to understand each other.

In this climate, the increasingly self-assertive states were not only picking fights with universal institutions but also with local ones. In order to establish themselves securely in their new positions of power, the kings rejected the traditional claims of all local authorities. This led to extended wars in next to all European countries. Peasants rose up in protest against taxes and the burdens imposed by repeated wars. There were massive peasant revolts in Germany in the 1520s with hundreds of thousands of participants and almost as many victims. In the latter part of the sixteenth century, there were major peasant uprisings in Sweden, Croatia, England and Switzerland. In France, in the middle of the seventeenth century, the nobility rose up in defence of its traditional rights and in rebellion against the encroachments of the king.

Medieval kings were really quite powerless. They had no proper bureaucracies at their disposal, no standing armies and few ways of raising money. In fact, there were few good roads, ports and not many large cities. These, however, soon came to be constructed. From the sixteenth century onwards the states established the rudiments of an administrative system and raised armies, both in order to fight their own peasants and in order to defend themselves against other states. Since such state-building was expensive, the search for money became a constant concern. The early modern state was more than anything an institutional machinery designed to develop and extract resources from society. In return for their taxes, the state provided ordinary people with defense and a rudimentary system of justice. If they refused to pay up, state officials had various unpleasant ways to make them suffer.

Early modern Europe was the golden age of political economy. During this period, the economy was not thought of as a distinct sphere separated from politics but instead as a tool of statecraft which the state could manipulate to serve its own ends. Economic development meant higher revenues from taxes and gave the kings access to more resources which they could use in their wars. The state was keen to encourage trade, not least since taxes on trade were a lot easier to collect than taxes on land. It was now that a search began for natural resources – agricultural land, forests, iron and copper ore, but also manpower – which the state might make use of. Maps were drawn up which located these resources within the country's borders, and lists were made of births, marriages and deaths in order to better keep track of the population. Domestic industries were set up and given state subsidies, above all in militarily significant sectors such as metal works and in sectors that were easy for the state to tax. In addition, various 'useful sciences' were encouraged, by the newly established scientific academies, and prizes were given to innovations and discoveries. In state-sponsored universities, future members of the emerging administrative class were taught how best to regulate society and assure peace and social order.

The Westphalian system

The European states emerged in the midst of struggle and strife, and struggle and strife have continued to characterise their existence. Yet, in early modern Europe it was no longer the competing claims of local and universal authorities that had to be combated but instead the competing claims of other states. The Thirty Years' War, 1618–1648, was the bloodiest and most protracted military confrontation of the era. As a result of the war Germany's population was reduced by around a third. What

the Swiss or the Scottish mercenaries did not steal, the Swedish troops destroyed. Many of the people who did not die on the battlefield died of the plague. The Thirty Years' War is often called a religious conflict since Catholic states confronted Protestants. Yet, Protestant and Catholic countries sometimes fought on the same side and religious dogma was clearly not the first thing on the minds of the combatants. Instead the war concerned which state should have hegemony (or dominance) over Europe. That is, which state, if any, would take over from the universal institutions of the Middle Ages. The main protagonists were two Catholic states, France and Austria, but Sweden – a Protestant country – intervened on France's side and in the end no dominant power emerged.

The Treaty of Westphalia, 1648, which concluded the 30 years of warfare, has come to symbolise the new way of organising international politics. From this point onwards, international politics was a matter of relations between states and no other political units. All states were sovereign, meaning that they laid claims to the exclusive right to rule their own territories and to act, in relation to other states, as they themselves saw fit. All states were formally equal and they had the same rights and obligations. Taken together, the states interacted with each other in a system in which there was no overarching power. Sovereignty and formal equality led to the problem of anarchy. Within a country 'anarchy' refers to a breakdown of law and order, but in relations between states it refers to a system where power is decentralised and there are no shared institutions with the right to enforce common rules. An anarchical world is a world where everyone looks after themselves and no one looks after the system as a whole. Instead, states had to rely on their own resources or to form alliances through which the power of one alliance of states could be balanced against the power of another alliance. Yet, as soon became clear, such power balances were precarious, easily subverted, and given the value attached to territorial acquisitions, states had an incentive to engage in aggressive wars. As a result, the new international system was characterised by constant tensions and threats of war – which often enough turned into actual cases of warfare.

At the same time various practices developed which helped regulate common affairs. The foremost example was the practice of diplomacy as exemplified by the way peace treaties were negotiated. From the seventeenth century onward, European states met after each major war in order to reach a settlement and lay down the terms of their future interaction. These diplomatic practices had their origin in relations between the city-states of northern Italy. Once these states had made themselves independent both of the pope and the emperor, they soon discovered that their relations had become vastly more complicated. In order to avoid misunderstandings and unnecessary conflicts, the different rulers began dispatching ambassadors to each other's courts. This diplomatic network provided a means of gathering information, of spying, but also a way of keeping in touch with one another, of carrying out negotiations and concluding deals. The practices of diplomacy soon expanded to include a number of mutually advantageous provisions: the embassies were given extraterritorial rights and legal immunity, diplomatic dispatches were regarded as inviolable and ambassadors had the right to worship the god of their choice. These originally north Italian practices gradually expanded to embrace more states and by the middle of the seventeenth century the system included France, Spain, Austria, England, Russia, Poland, Denmark, Sweden and the Ottoman Empire. Diplomatic practices were never powerful enough to prevent war, indeed wars continued to be common, but they did provide Europeans with a sense of a common identity. A European state was, more than anything, a state that participated in the system of shared diplomatic practices.

An inter-national system

The early modern state was a coercive machinery designed to make war and to extract resources from society. Yet at the end of the eighteenth century, this machinery came to be radically transformed. Or rather, the 'state' was combined with a 'nation' forming a compound noun – the 'nation-state' – which was organised differently and pursued different goals. A nation, in contrast to a state, constitutes a community of people joined by a shared identity and by common social practices. Communities of various kinds have always existed but they now became, for the first time, a political concern. As a new breed of nationalist leaders came to argue, the nation should take over the state and make use of its institutional structures to further the nation's ends. In one country after another the nationalists were successful in these aims. The nation added an interior life to the state, we might perhaps say; the nation was a soul added to the body of the early modern state machinery.

The revolutions that took place in Britain's North American colonies in 1776, and in France in 1789, provided models for other nationalists to follow. 'We the People of the United States' – the first words of the Preamble to the US Constitution – was a phrase which itself would have been literally unthinkable in an earlier era. In France, the king was officially the only legitimate political actor and the people as a whole were excluded from politics. In addition, the power of the aristocracy and the church remained strong, above all in the countryside where they were the largest landowners. In the revolution of 1789, the *old regime* was overthrown and with it the entire social order. The French nation was from now on to be governed by the people, the nation, and in accordance with the principles of *liberté, égalité et fraternité* – liberty, equality and brotherhood.

Already in 1792, confrontation began between the revolutionary French nation and the kings of the rest of Europe. The wars were to go on for close to 25 years, most ferociously during the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century named after

the French general, Napoleon Bonaparte, who made himself emperor of France. In contrast to the kings of the old regimes, the revolutionary French government could rely on the whole people to make contributions to the war due to the power of patriotism. This allowed first the revolutionaries, and later Napoleon, to create a formidable fighting machine which set about conquering Europe. Germany was quickly overrun and its sudden and complete defeat was a source of considerable embarrassment to all Germans. The Holy Roman Empire, by now in tatters, was finally dissolved in 1806 in the wake of Napoleon's conquest. Yet, since there was no German state around which prospective nationalists could rally, the initial response was formulated in cultural rather than in military terms. Nationalist sentiment focused on the German language, German traditions and a shared sense of history. Before long a strong German nation began looking around for a unified German state. The goal was eventually achieved in 1871, after Germany – appropriately enough, perhaps – had defeated France in a war.

The Congress of Vienna of 1815, where a settlement was reached at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, was supposed to have returned Europe to its pre-revolutionary ways. Yet, nationalist sentiments were growing across the continent and they constantly threatened to undermine the settlement. All over Europe national communities demanded to be included into the politics of their respective countries. Nationalism in the first part of the nineteenth century was a liberal sentiment concerning self-determination – the right of a people to determine its own fate. This programme had far-reaching implications for the way politics was organised domestically, but it also had profound ramifications for international politics. Most obviously, the idea of self-determination undermined the political legitimacy of Europe's empires. If all the different peoples that these empires contained gained the right to determine their own fates, the map of Europe would have to be radically redrawn. In 1848 this prospect seemed to become a reality as nationalist uprisings quickly spread across the continent. Everywhere the people demanded the right to rule themselves.

Although the nationalist revolutions of 1848 were defeated by the political establishment, the sentiments themselves were impossible to control. Across Europe an increasingly prosperous middle-class demanded inclusion in the political system and their demands were increasingly expressed through the language of nationalism. The Finns wanted an independent Finland; the Bulgarians an independent Bulgaria; the Serbs an independent Serbia, and so on. In 1861 Italy too – long divided into separate city-states and dominated by the Church – became a unified country and an independent nation. Yet it was only with the conclusion of the First World War in 1918 that self-determination was acknowledged as a right. After the First World War most people in Europe formed their own nation-states.

As a result of the nationalist revolutions, the European international system became for the first time truly 'inter-national'. That is, while the Westphalian system concerned relations between states, world affairs in the nineteenth century increasingly came to concern relations between nation-states. In fact, the word 'international' itself was coined only in 1783, by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham. In most respects, however, the inter-national system continued to operate in much the same fashion as the Westphalian inter-state system. Nation-states claimed the same right to sovereignty which meant that they were formally equal to each other. Together, they interacted in an anarchical system in which power was decentralised and wars were a constant threat. Yet, the addition of the nation changed the nature of the interaction in crucial ways. For one thing, leaders who ruled their countries without at least the tacit support of their national communities were increasingly seen as illegitimate. This also meant that newly created nation-states such as Italy and Germany were automatically regarded as legitimate members of the European community of nations. They were legitimate since the people, in theory at least, were in charge.

There were also new hopes for world peace. While kings wage war for the sake of glory or personal gain, a people is believed to be more attuned to the aspirations of another people. Inspired by such hopes, liberal philosophers devised plans for how a 'perpetual peace' could be established. For some considerable time, these assumptions seemed quite feasible. The nineteenth century – or, more accurately, the period from 1815 to 1914 – was indeed an uncharacteristically peaceful period in European history. At the time, great hopes were associated with the increase in trade. As Adam Smith pointed out in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), a nation is rich not because it has a lot of natural resources but because it has the capacity to manufacture things that others want. In order to capitalise on this capacity, you need to trade and the more you trade the wealthier you are likely to become. Once the quest for profits and market shares has become more important than the quest for a neighbouring state's territory, world peace would naturally follow. In a world in which everyone is busy trading with each other, no one can afford to go to war.

By the twentieth century most of these liberal hopes were dashed. As the First World War demonstrated, nation-states could be as violent as the early-modern states. In fact, nation-states were far more lethal, not least since they were able to involve their entire population in the war effort together with the entirety of its shared resources. The peaceful quest for profits and market shares had not replaced the anxious quest for security or the aggressive quest for pre-eminence. In the Second World War, the industrial might of the world's most developed nations was employed for military ends with aerial bombardments of civilian populations, including the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan. Between 1939 and 1945 over 60 million people were killed – around 2.5 per cent of the world's population. This figure included the six million Jews exterminated by Germany in the Holocaust, which was one of the worst genocides in recorded history. After the Second World War, the military competition continued between the United States and the Soviet Union. This was known as a 'cold war' since the two superpowers never engaged each other in direct warfare, but they fought several wars by proxy such as those in Korea and Vietnam.

The Europeans and the rest of the world

Most of what happened in Europe before the nineteenth century was of great concern to the Europeans but of only marginal relevance to people elsewhere. Europe certainly had a significant impact on the Americas, North and South. However, it had far less impact on Asia and relations with Africa were largely restricted to a few trading ports. The large, rich and powerful empires of East Asia were organised quite differently than the European states, and international politics followed different principles. The same can be said for other parts of the world such as the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world. And yet, it was the European model of statehood and the European way of organising international relations that eventually came to organise all of world politics.

As previously mentioned, trade was an important source of revenue for states in early modern Europe, and no trade was more lucrative than the trade with East Asia. Europeans had developed a taste for East Asian goods already in the Middle Ages – for spices above all, but also for silk and other exotic commodities. During the Mongol Empire, 1206–1368, much of the vast stretch of the Eurasian landmass was unified under one set of rulers and it was easy to obtain goods via the great caravan routes which criss-crossed Asia. When the Mongol Empire fell, overland trade became more insecure and the Europeans began looking for ways to get to East Asia by sea. It was when Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope, at the southernmost tip of Africa, in 1497 that the Europeans for the first time discovered a direct way to travel by sea to East Asia. The Portuguese took the lead in this trade, but they were soon replaced by the Dutch, and above all, by the Dutch East India Company, founded in 1602. All over Europe similar trading companies were soon established and they were all granted monopolies on the highly profitable East Asian trade. These monopolies were sold to the highest bidder, and for European kings this was an easy and quick way to raise revenue.

The Europeans who came back from travels in East Asia were amazed at the wondrous things they had seen. East Asian kings, they reported, were far richer and more powerful than European rulers. Europe seemed a provincial backwater compared to the centres of civilisation they had stumbled upon. From an East Asian point of view, however, the Europeans were nothing but a small contingent of traders who docked at a few ports, conducted their trade, and then left. Yet, the increase in trade which the opening of new trade routes produced was nevertheless important to the countries of East Asia. The Europeans paid for their goods in silver – often mined at Potosí, an enormous mine in today's Bolivia – and this inflow of precious metal helped spur inter-Asian trade. In order to facilitate commerce, various European trading companies were given the right to establish small trading posts. The Portuguese established outposts in Goa in India, Macau in China, East Timor and Malacca in today's Malaysia; while the Dutch founded Batavia, a trading post on the island of Java in today's Indonesia.

In the Americas, the Europeans were far more ruthless. The Spanish conquered the Aztecs in Mexico and the Incas in Peru and gradually took over the bulk of the continent. In North America the English established themselves, together with the Dutch and the French. The European invasion was associated with widespread genocide. In South America many natives died as a result of being overworked in mines and plantations and in North America the European settlers made outright war on the natives. Yet in both North and South America the largest number of natives died through exposure to European diseases such as the measles. Africa, meanwhile, remained largely unknown to the Europeans.

It was only in the nineteenth century that relations between Europe and the rest of the world were irrevocably transformed. The reason is above all to be found in economic changes taking place in Europe itself. At the end of the eighteenth century, new ways of manufacturing goods were invented which made use of machines powered by steam, and later by electricity, which made it possible to engage in large-scale factory production. As a result of this so called 'industrial revolution', the Europeans could produce many more things and do it far more efficiently. As cheap, mass-produced goods flooded European markets, the Europeans began looking for new markets overseas. They also needed raw material for their factories, which in many cases only could be found outside of Europe. These economic imperatives meant that the Europeans took a renewed interest in world trade. This time it was the British who took the lead. It was in Britain that the industrial revolution had started and the British, an island nation with a long history of international commerce, had a navy second to none. Before long they had established commercial outposts from Canada to South Africa and Australia, but it was India that became the most important colony. The commercial outposts and colonial settlements soon grew in size as the British sought to protect their economic investments by means of military force.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, other European countries joined in this scramble for colonies, not least in Africa. Colonial possessions became a symbol of 'great power' status, and the new European nation-states often proved themselves to be very aggressive colonisers. France added West Africa and Indochina to its growing empire, and the Germans and Italians also joined the race once their respective countries were unified. This explains how, by the time of the First World War in 1914, most parts of the world were in European hands. There were some exceptions to this rule – China, Japan, Siam, Persia, Ethiopia and Nepal, among others – but even in these ostensibly independent countries the Europeans had a strong presence.

But this was not how the European state and the European way of organising international relations came to spread to the rest of the world, at least not directly. After all, a colonised country is the very opposite of a sovereign state; the colonised peoples had no nation-states and enjoyed no self-determination. It was instead through the process of liberating themselves from the colonisers that the European models were copied. Since the Europeans only would grant sovereignty to states that were similar to their own, the only way to become independent was to become independent on European terms. To create such Europe-like states was thus the project in which all non-European political leaders engaged. Once they finally made themselves independent in the decades after the Second World War, as an international climate of decolonisation took hold, all new states had a familiar form. They had their respective territories and fortified borders; their own capitals, armies, foreign ministries, flags, national anthems and all the other paraphernalia of European statehood. Whether there were alternative, non-European, ways of organising a state and its foreign relations was never discussed. Whether it made sense for the newly independent states to try to live up to European ideals was never discussed either. This, briefly, is how the modern world was made.

Conclusion

In this chapter we focused on Europe since contemporary international politics, for good and for bad, was shaped by Europeans and by non-Europeans copying European examples. This is a story of how the state emerged as a sovereign actor in the late Middle Ages by simultaneously rejecting the traditional claims made by universal and local institutions. It is a story of how the state went on to strengthen its power by means of bureaucracies and armies. European states were always competing with each other, and while the military competition had disastrous effects in terms of human suffering, the economic competition that took place was a spur to development and social change. In the course of the nineteenth century, the state was transformed into a nation-state in which, in theory at least, the people as a whole were in charge. There were great hopes that nation-states would be more peaceful in their relations with one another, but these hopes were soon dashed. Nation-states were ferocious colonisers and in the twentieth century the world as a whole suffered through two devastating world wars and came to the brink of nuclear Armageddon during the Cold War. In the twenty-first century there are once again hopes for a better future, but as long as the European state-system (now the international system) lasts a more enduring peace is unlikely.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Ringmar mean when he writes: "According to a time-honoured metaphor, we can talk about international politics as a 'world stage' on which states are the leading actors"?
2. "Today's international system is, for good and for bad, made by Europeans and by non-Europeans copying European examples." Explain.
3. Describe the rise of the sovereign state.
4. Describe how the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) symbolized the "new way of organizing international politics." What were the essential characteristics of this new order?
5. What is the role of diplomacy in this "new international system...characterized by constant tensions and threats of war..."?
6. Describe the impact of nationalism on the inter-national system of states.
7. "...the European model of statehood and the European way of organizing international relations...eventually came to organize all world politics." Describe and explain what Ringmar means by this claim being sure to include the impact of colonialism and the process/politics of decolonization.

References

Smith, Adam. 1776. *The Wealth of Nations*.

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Key Terms and Definitions

- **Authoritarian:** A regime characterized by centralized power in a single authority or a small group, with limited political freedoms and often relying on coercion to maintain control.
- **Cold War:** The ideological, political, economic, and cultural struggle between the USSR and the US and their allies during the decades following WWII until the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked by proxy wars throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas.
- **Cybersecurity:** The protection of internet-connected systems, including hardware, software, and data, from cyberattacks. In International Relations, cybersecurity is increasingly important due to the rise of information warfare and the need to protect national and global digital infrastructures.
- **Digital Technologies:** Tools and systems that generate, store, or process data electronically. In the context of International Relations, digital technologies include the internet, social media platforms, and other online communication tools that have transformed state interactions, diplomacy, and the exercise of power on the global stage. These technologies have also introduced new challenges, such as cybersecurity threats and information warfare, making them critical areas of study within the discipline.
- **Diplomacy:** The practice of conducting negotiations and managing relationships between states. Diplomacy is a key tool in maintaining international peace and resolving conflicts.
- **Disarmament:** The reduction or withdrawal of military forces and weapons. Disarmament efforts, particularly after major conflicts, are aimed at promoting global security and reducing the likelihood of future wars.
- **Economic Instability:** A condition where an economy experiences significant fluctuations in growth, unemployment, inflation, and other key economic indicators, which can lead to political unrest and affect international relations.
- **Fascism:** A far-right political ideology characterized by dictatorial power, extreme nationalism, and suppression of opposition. The rise of fascist regimes in the 20th century posed significant challenges to international peace and stability.
- **Globalization:** The process of increased interconnectedness and interdependence among countries, particularly in terms of trade, culture, and communication. Globalization has brought both opportunities and challenges to international relations.
- **International Relations (IR):** The academic discipline that examines the interactions between states, international organizations, and non-state actors on a global scale, focusing on issues such as conflict, cooperation, and the impacts of global processes.
- **League of Nations:** An international organization established after World War I to promote peace and cooperation among countries. It was the precursor to the United Nations but was ultimately unable to prevent the outbreak of World War II.
- **Migration:** The movement of people from one place to another, often across borders, for reasons such as economic opportunity, conflict, or environmental changes. Migration is a significant issue in international relations, affecting policy and global security.
- **Militarism:** The belief or desire of a government or people that a country should maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote national interests.
- **Multilateralism:** The practice of multiple countries working together on a given issue, typically within the framework of international institutions. Multilateralism is a key aspect of modern international relations, especially in addressing global challenges.
- **Multinational Corporations (MNCs):** Large companies that operate in multiple countries. These entities have a significant impact on global trade, economics, and sometimes even political decisions in the countries where they operate.
- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Independent organizations that operate outside of government control, often focusing on social, humanitarian, or environmental issues. NGOs can influence international relations through advocacy, service provision, and policy recommendations.
- **Non-State Actors:** Entities that influence international relations but are not affiliated with any particular state, including organizations such as multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and terrorist groups.
- **Sovereignty:** The principle that states have the authority to govern themselves without external interference.
- **Terrorism:** The use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, to achieve political aims. Terrorism is a significant challenge in international relations, requiring coordinated global responses.
- **Territorial Integrity:** The principle that a state's borders are inviolable and that its territory should not be altered or infringed upon by other states. This concept is central to the international system established by the Treaty of Westphalia.
- **Treaty of Westphalia:** A series of peace treaties signed in 1648 that ended the Thirty Years' War in Europe and established the principles of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, laying the foundation for the modern international system.
- **United Nations:** An international organization founded in 1945 to promote peace, security, and cooperation among states. It succeeded the League of Nations and plays a central role in contemporary international relations.
- **World Bank:** An international financial institution that provides loans and grants to the governments of poorer countries for

the purpose of pursuing capital projects. It is a key player in global economic development and poverty reduction efforts.

- **World Trade Organization (WTO):** An international organization that regulates trade between nations. The WTO provides a framework for negotiating trade agreements and a dispute resolution process aimed at enforcing participants' adherence to trade agreements.

1.10: Additional Readings

Scholarly Resources

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce. 1985. "Toward a Scientific Understanding of International Conflict: A Personal View." *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 29, No. 2: 121-136.

Kaplan, Morton A. 1966. "The New Great Debate: Traditionalism vs. Science in International Relations," *World Politics*. Vol. 19, No. 1: 1-20.

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1.11: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 1

1. What were the most important principles emerging from the Treaty of Westphalia?
2. What major developments occurred following WWI and WWII?
3. What key issues defined the late 20th and early 21st centuries?
4. How has International Relations evolved as a discipline since its inception?
5. What role did colonialism and de-colonization play in the development of the international system? See section 1.8.

2: LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Introduction

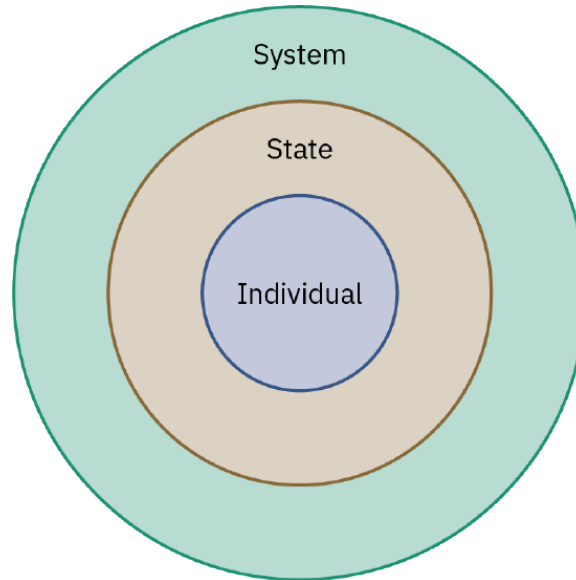


Figure 2.1: Three concentric circles labeled from the center outward: "Individual," "State," and "System," representing levels of analysis. (CC BY-NC 4.0.; Jill Kirkham via [International Relations: Introduction Essentials](#))

Figure 2.1 illustrates how individuals exist within larger structures of states and global systems. Each level shapes and constrains the behavior and choices within it, showing the interconnectedness of personal, political, and systemic dynamics.

The concept of levels of analysis in International Relations (IR) serves as a crucial framework for understanding the complex causes of international events and the behaviors of states and other actors on the global stage. By breaking down the causes into different levels—individual, state, and system—scholars and practitioners can gain a more nuanced understanding of how various factors interact to shape international outcomes. These levels offer distinct yet interrelated perspectives, each highlighting different dimensions of international relations.

Learning Objectives

- Identify levels of analysis and their importance in IR theorizing.
- Distinguish each level of analysis and describe their interplay.
- Illustrate how levels of analysis impact international outcomes.

2.1: Individual Level

2.2: State Level

2.3: System Level

2.4: Interplay of Different Levels of Analysis

2.5: Conclusion

2.6: Deeper Dive- Levels of Analysis

2.7: Glossary

[2.8: Additional Readings](#)

[2.9: Discussion Questions](#)

2.1: Individual Level

Introduction to the Individual Level

At the individual level of analysis, the focus is on the personal characteristics, perceptions, decisions, and actions of key leaders and decision-makers. This level posits that the behavior of states can often be traced back to the beliefs, biases, and psychological factors influencing individual leaders. The individual level of analysis emphasizes the importance of understanding the personal motivations and psychological makeup of leaders, as these factors can directly shape the trajectory of international events. Individual leaders' perceptions of other states' intentions and capabilities, whether accurate or flawed, significantly influence their decisions. For example, a leader who perceives a rival state as a threat might be more inclined to adopt aggressive policies, such as military intervention or economic sanctions, to counter perceived dangers. Psychological biases, such as overconfidence, fear, or risk aversion, can profoundly impact decision-making processes. These biases often lead to miscalculations or actions that may not align with a state's broader strategic interests. Leaders might make decisions based on incomplete or biased information, leading to outcomes that escalate conflicts or destabilize international relations. Theories like prospect theory and image theory explore how individual cognitive processes and personal experiences influence international relations. Prospect theory, for example, suggests that leaders are more likely to take risks to avoid losses than to achieve gains, which can lead to more aggressive or defensive strategies.

2.2: State Level

Introduction to the State Level

The state level of analysis shifts the focus to the internal characteristics of states, such as their political institutions, economic systems, and domestic politics. This level examines how these internal factors influence a state's behavior on the international stage. The state level of analysis underscores the importance of domestic political structures and processes in shaping how states interact with each other on the global stage. It highlights how internal factors can either constrain or empower a state's ability to pursue its international objectives. The nature of a state's political institutions and regime type, including whether it is a democracy to an autocracy, significantly influences its foreign policy decisions. Democracies, for instance, are often constrained by public opinion and the need to maintain electoral support, which can lead to more cautious or cooperative foreign policies. In contrast, autocracies, which are less accountable to the public, may pursue more aggressive or unilateral policies. Within a state, various interest groups, bureaucratic organizations, and public opinion can shape foreign policy decisions. For example, powerful industrial lobbies might push for policies that favor international trade agreements, while military organizations might advocate for increased defense spending or interventionist policies. The bureaucratic politics model suggests that foreign policy decisions are often the result of bargaining among different agencies, each with its own interests and perspectives.

2.3: System Level

Introduction to the System Level

The international system level of analysis looks at the broad, structural factors that influence state behavior. This level considers the global environment in which states operate, focusing on the distribution of power, the presence of international institutions, and the norms that govern state interactions. The international system level of analysis provides a macro perspective, highlighting the influence of global structures and processes on the behavior of states. It emphasizes how the anarchic nature of the international system and the distribution of power among states create opportunities and constraints that shape state behavior. The international system is characterized by anarchy, meaning there is no overarching authority above states. This lack of a central governing body creates a self-help system where states must rely on their own capabilities for survival. Anarchy leads to the security dilemma, where one state's efforts to enhance its security (e.g., by building up its military) are perceived as threats by other states, prompting them to also increase their security measures. This dynamic often results in an arms race or heightened tensions, even if none of the states involved originally intended to provoke conflict. The distribution of power within the international system—whether unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar—greatly influences global stability and the likelihood of conflict. In a unipolar system, where one state holds dominant power, there is often greater stability, as no other state can effectively challenge the hegemon. In a bipolar system, like during the Cold War, two superpowers dominate, leading to a balance of power that can either stabilize or exacerbate tensions. Multipolar systems, where power is distributed among several states, are often seen as the most unstable, as shifting alliances and rivalries can lead to frequent conflicts.

Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), such as the United Nations, and norms, such as sovereignty and non-aggression, play significant roles in facilitating cooperation between states and mitigating the effects of anarchy. These institutions provide platforms for negotiation, conflict resolution, and the establishment of international laws and agreements. However, their effectiveness often depends on the willingness of states to adhere to these norms and the ability of the institutions to enforce them. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs are made up of private citizens. NGOs do not enter into treaties or other international agreements. Neorealism and world systems theory are key frameworks that explore the influence of systemic factors on state behavior. Neorealism, for instance, argues that the anarchic structure of the international system compels states to prioritize security and power above all else. World systems theory, on the other hand, examines the global economic system, highlighting the stratification between core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral states and how this hierarchy influences international relations.

2.4: Interplay of Different Levels of Analysis

Introduction to the Interplay of Levels

While each level of analysis offers valuable insights into international relations, they are not mutually exclusive. In reality, these levels often interact in complex ways to shape international outcomes. For example, a leader's personal beliefs (individual level) might influence how they perceive and react to international norms (system level), while domestic political pressures (state level) might constrain their ability to act on these perceptions. The interplay of different levels of analysis underscores the complexity of international relations. By considering multiple levels, scholars and practitioners can develop a more nuanced understanding of global events and the various factors that drive state behavior.

Multi-Level Interactions

International events are rarely the result of factors at a single level of analysis. Instead, they often emerge from the interaction of factors at multiple levels. For instance, the Cuban Missile Crisis can be understood through the lens of all three levels: the individual level (the decisions and perceptions of leaders like John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev), the state level (the domestic political pressures within the U.S. and the Soviet Union), and the system level (the broader Cold War context and the balance of power between the two superpowers).

Debates on the Dominance of Levels

Scholars have long debated whether one level of analysis is more important than others in explaining international outcomes. Some argue that systemic factors ultimately dictate state behavior, as states are constrained by the anarchic structure of the international system and the distribution of power. Others emphasize the critical role of individual leaders or domestic politics, arguing that these factors often have a decisive impact on foreign policy decisions. However, most scholars agree that a comprehensive understanding of international relations requires an integrated approach that considers multiple levels of analysis.

Case Studies and Application

Applying the levels of analysis framework to specific case studies can provide deeper insights into international events. For example, the decision of the United States to invade Iraq in 2003 can be analyzed at all three levels: the individual level (the beliefs and motivations of George W. Bush and his advisors), the state level (domestic political pressures and the influence of interest groups), and the system level (the post-9/11 international security environment and the distribution of power in the Middle East).

2.5: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

The concept of levels of analysis in International Relations is a fundamental tool for understanding the complexities of global politics. By categorizing the causes of international events into individual, state, and system levels, scholars can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape state behavior and international outcomes. Each level of analysis offers unique insights, but they are most powerful when used in combination to provide a holistic view of the dynamics that drive international relations.

The individual level highlights the importance of leaders' perceptions, biases, and decisions. The state level emphasizes the role of domestic politics, political institutions, and regime types. The system level focuses on the broader structural factors, such as anarchy, power distribution, and international institutions. Together, these levels of analysis provide a multi-dimensional framework for understanding the complex interactions that define the international system.

As scholars continue to study international relations, the levels of analysis framework will remain an essential tool for dissecting the myriad factors that influence global events. By integrating insights from all three levels, we can develop a deeper understanding of the forces that shape our world and the interactions between states that define the global order.

2.6: Deeper Dive- Levels of Analysis

Gebhard's "One World, Many Actors: Levels of Analysis in International Relations"

International Relations (IR) traditionally focused on interactions between states. However, this conventional view has been broadened over the years to include relationships between all sorts of political entities ('polities'), including international organisations, multinational corporations, societies and citizens. IR captures a vast array of themes ranging from the growing interconnectedness of people to old and new forms of security, dialogue and conflict between visions, beliefs and ideologies, the environment, space, the global economy, poverty and climate change. The sheer number of actors and issues that are relevant to IR can be overwhelming. This can make it seem like a daunting task to not just study various aspects of IR but to try to grasp the bigger picture.

All the more important are the analytical tools that scholars have developed in an attempt to make the field more manageable – not just for newcomers to the discipline but also for themselves. Social scientists in general spend quite a lot of time thinking about effective ways of structuring their thinking and of processing the complexity of the reality they endeavour to study, analyse and understand. A lot of this kind of analytical sense-making in IR happens in the form of theories. Scholars use theories to explain and capture the meaning of real-life events in the form of abstract interpretations and generalised assumptions. On the one hand, theories can be 'empirical' – based on measurable experiences, usually through observation or experimentation. Empirical theories generally seek to try to explain the world as *it is*. On the other hand, theories can be 'normative' – meaning that they build on principles and assumptions about how social interactions should occur. In other words, normative theories generally seek to present a version of world that *ought to be*.

Before scholars develop or adopt any specific theories, however, they take what is often a subconscious decision in selecting the focus of their analysis. Following this, they normally stick with their choice without reflecting very much on alternative approaches to the issue. As students of IR it can be helpful to equip ourselves with a basic overview of the perspectives one can adopt when analysing just about any topic. This chapter will do this by looking at different 'levels of analysis' as one of the most common ways of structuring scholarly debates in IR.

Levels of analysis

Thinking of different levels of analysis in IR means that the observer and analyst may choose to focus on the international system as a whole, parts of the system in interaction with each other, or some of its parts in particular. What forms the parts or components of this system is again a matter of perspective. The international system can be conceived of as made up of states, groups of states, organisations, societies or individuals within and across those societies. IR generally distinguishes between three levels of analysis: the system, the state, and the individual – but the group level is also important to consider as a fourth. To be able to use the level of analysis as an analytical device, we need to be clear about what we are most interested in. We have to clarify for ourselves what it is exactly that we want to look at when discussing a particular theme or issue concerning the 'international' sphere. If we were to study and understand the 2008 global financial crisis and its consequences, for example, there would be various ways of approaching, discussing and presenting the issue. To determine the level of analysis we would need to determine what those levels are and ask ourselves some questions, which we can explore below.

The individual level

Would we look at the actions of individuals responding to the financial crisis according to their own position or responsibilities? For example, a prime minister encountering the leader of another state to negotiate an important financial agreement, the head of a large corporation adopting a policy to rescue their business or even the situation of individual citizens and their attitude towards austerity measures?

The group level

Would we be more interested in the actions of groups of individuals, such as all voters of a country and the way they express their

views in the general election, political parties picking up on the issue in their campaigns or social movements forming to counter the effects of the crisis on society?

Would we be interested in activist/pressure groups like 'Anonymous' that seek to influence the global debate about the winners and losers of globalisation and capitalism?

The state level

Would we look at states as actors in their own right as if they were clearly defined entities that have certain preferences, and accordingly, look at their actions and decisions to find an answer to our analytical questions?

Would we then be looking at how states interact with each other to deal with the crisis – in other words, their foreign policy? How they build off each other's suggestions and react to international developments and trends? How they cooperate, say, in the framework of international organisations?

Or would we be looking at them as competitors and antagonists, each of them pushing for a stronger position in what makes up the world economy?

The system level

Finally, might we try to look at the global level, the big picture, and try to grasp wider ranging dynamics that emerge from the global economic 'system' to affect its various components, states, national economies, societies, individuals?

A much-debated example of this kind of system perspective has been presented by Daniel W. Drezner (2014), who argued controversially that the international system of financial governance did well at coping with the 2008 global financial crisis. He looked at how various parts of the system worked together to mitigate wider repercussions. After all, while we call it the global financial crisis, the world has really not changed much since then and you might argue it has been business as usual for the system.

How the level of analysis determines our findings

Being aware of various possible perspectives helps us to develop an understanding of where we stand as analysts and observers. It also guides us through the process of investigation and analysis. First of all, the particular perspective we assume determines the kind of information we would need to gather and look at in order to be able to answer our questions and draw meaningful conclusions.

A system-level ('systemic') study would need to consider global linkages that go beyond single interactions between states. It would need to look at such things as the balance of power between states and how that determines what happens in global politics. This could include developments that are even outside the immediate control of any particular state or group of states, such as the global economy, transnational terrorism or the internet.

A state-level study would require careful consideration of what kinds of states we are looking at (how they are ordered politically), their geographical position, their historical ties and experiences and their economic standing. It would likely also look at the foreign policy of states, meaning their approach to and practice of interacting with other states. Key indicators of the foreign policy of states would be the policies proposed and decided by governments, statements of top-level politicians but also the role and behaviour of diplomats and their adjoining bureaucratic structures.

A group level analysis would again need to try and break the analysis down into certain kinds of groups, how they relate to the state level and where they position themselves with respect to the global dimension of the issues they are dealing with. An example of this can be seen in the work of Engelen et al. (2012), who discuss the global financial crisis as the 'misrule of experts', pointing at the politicised role of technocratic circles and the relative lack of democratic control over the boards of large banks and corporations. A group-level analysis focusing on foreign policy would look, for example, at the role of lobbying groups and the way they influence national decision-making on an issue.

If looking at the actions of individuals, we would likely also need to engage with the implications of human nature. This can be seen in the psychology and emotions behind people's actions and decisions, their fears and their visions as well as their access to information and capacity to make a difference. Psychological factors do not only matter at the level of individual members

of society or of a group. They are also an important factor in the analysis of foreign policy, whenever particular mindsets and perceptions of political leaders and key actors might influence their decisions and behaviour.

Which one of these specific perspectives we choose would greatly influence our findings. In other words, the focus or level of analysis determines the outcome of our scholarly investigations. Meanwhile, the real-life events we are analysing remain the same, of course. That is a particularly important consideration if we aim at developing generalised conclusions from our observations. Strictly speaking, our conclusions would only be valid within the scope of the level of analysis we chose to focus on. Insights provided by other perspectives would remain outside the remit of our analysis. To illustrate this, let's stick with the above example of the global financial crisis as it is one of the more debated issues in contemporary politics.

From the system level

If we studied the global financial crisis from a system-level perspective, for instance, we would expect to gain an insight into the global dynamics that make up the international financial system. Focusing on the big picture would enable us to develop a comprehensive model of explanation that could potentially capture the states and national economies within that global system. The explanations we derive from this systemic model, however, might exaggerate the system-level factors that have conditioned the global financial crisis. As a consequence, we might overlook a lot of psychological and sociological issues that would be the subject of a group-level or individual-level analysis.

From the state level

If we studied the same theme from a state perspective, we would develop a greater level of detail about specific circumstances in particular states as well as in their interaction with each other. The distinction here, as will be discussed further below, is not quite this rigid in practice as the state level is rarely looked at in isolation but more in its wider systemic context. For our example this would mean that the world financial system is taken as the framework in which state actors operate, so state action is often conditioned by factors beyond the state's control.

From the group level

If we studied the issue from a group-level perspective, we would yet again reach a different result in our findings. We would potentially emphasise aspects of the global financial crisis that would escape a more comprehensive global level analysis. This includes analysing the impact of the crisis on society and the livelihoods of individuals as exemplified in the UN Report 'The Global Social Crisis' (2011).

From the individual level

Finally, focusing on the individual level and, say, particular actions of specific personalities in the public realm – be they politicians, diplomats or bankers – would lead to us drawing different conclusions again about the causes and consequences of the financial crisis.

The bigger picture

In short, being aware and acknowledging the potential gaps in our observation – that is to say, all of what is not directly captured by our perspective or level of analysis – is important. Applying rigour in our analysis is also important. These guidelines for scholarly investigation are applied in many academic disciplines, including the natural sciences. What German theoretical physicist Werner K. Heisenberg (1962, 58) said in respect to research in his field very much also applies to IR; 'we have to remember that what we observe is not nature in itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning.' Scholarly writings are nevertheless not always explicit about their particular perspective or level of analysis. So, as a reader, it is important to stay critical and to look closely and enquire whenever an argument presented to us appears to straddle potentially conflicting analytical lenses.

As you start to read deeper on particular IR issues, always remind yourself of the importance of analytical clarity. Do not hesitate to expect and demand it even from renowned authors and established publications outlets. Note that clarity concerning one's level of analysis does not necessarily mean that different perspectives could not be used in conjunction with each other – on the contrary. As will be argued further below, many of today's political challenges are so complex that they require our analyses to span across various levels.

Foreign policy

A crucial area where the need to broaden our levels of analysis is particularly important is the analysis of the foreign policy of states. Hopefully, we can see this immediately due to the fact that any state activity that crosses their national borders, such as a foreign policy, will have implications for other states. We can look at foreign policy at the state level by analysing government policies and diplomatic decisions in isolation. However, governments are also actors on the world stage and their foreign policies contribute to what we call international relations. As highlighted above, foreign policy can also be explained by looking at the individual level, for example, the psychological and political factors that guide leaders and their advisers in their foreign policy decisions. Those decisions in turn then feed into national decisions that matter at the state level and in relation to other states.

It can be helpful to think of foreign policy behaviour as something that is influenced by a range of factors. Some of them can be found within a state, in its political traditions, its socio-economic profile, its political party system or in the minds of leading politicians. Others come from outside, from the global system that builds the context within which states operate. This does not mean that every meaningful discussion of foreign policy needs to look at all these aspects: investigations at one particular level should be used very carefully to draw conclusions about a different level. Where the levels overlap, we need to be aware that each one will require us to look at different kinds of evidence.

To help lock in the foreign policy example, we can draw on the case of British prime minister Tony Blair. Blair is often remembered for his decision to take the UK to war with Iraq in 2003, in coalition with the United States. To examine this important foreign policy decision from the individual level, we might draw on Blair's personal convictions as a committed anti-terrorist with a strong moral sense based on his Christianity, something that helped him forge a common personal bond with the US president, George W. Bush. If we move our focus to the state level, we can judge equally as fairly that Blair might have been acting to preserve the Anglo-American 'special relationship' that was vital to British national security. The Iraq war period was a contentious one in Europe, with many European nations rejecting American plans for war. If Blair had followed some of his European colleagues and not supported the war, then he may have put a vital bilateral relationship in danger. Finally, we move to the international, or systemic, level. Here, we are not so much focused on Blair himself since the systemic level often supposes that it is forces operating at the international level that shape behaviour. By this reading, Blair may have felt compelled to participate in what he saw as a shift in world order that was defined by the existence of dangerous transnational terrorism on one hand, and a coalition led by the United States on the other hand who were waging a war on terrorism. Of course, as has been noted already, you would also be able to argue that Blair's motives might have been drawn from more than one of these levels – perhaps even all of them.

Levels of analysis and the changing ambitions of a discipline

Apart from making us more critical and discerning readers, being aware of the issue of different levels of analysis can also help us understand the way in which the academic discipline of IR has developed over time. To begin with, in the early days of IR – say, from 1919 until the after the Second World War – a lot of what could be called traditional or conventional IR was not concerned with any potential distinctions between different levels of analysis or theoretical perspectives. J. David Singer (1961, 78) lamented that scholars would simply "roam up and down the ladder of organizational complexity with remarkable abandon, focusing upon the total system, international organizations, regions, coalitions, extra-national associations, nations, domestic pressure groups, social classes, elites, and individuals as the needs of the moment required."

Singer's criticism of this 'general sluggishness' (Singer 1961, 78) highlights another value in thinking of IR as something that can be studied from different and distinctive perspectives. Being clear about our level of analysis can prevent us from indulging in analytical 'cherry-picking', that is to say, from randomly gathering evidence across different levels in pursuit of an answer to our research questions. This 'vertical drift', as Singer calls it, can compromise the accuracy of our observations and undermine the validity of our findings. That in turn can obscure some of the detail that might have otherwise turned out to be the key to a conclusive explanation. This does not mean that any one piece of scholarly work must not consider aspects from different levels of analysis. However, when moving between different levels of analysis, we need to do so openly and explicitly. We also need to acknowledge the analytical consequences of drifting between levels: that our search for evidence will need to be comprehensive and that we might have to look at a different set of data or material for each additional aspect. For example, if you were to explain Germany's decision to open its borders to hundreds of thousands of refugees in 2015 you might want to look at the external pressures as much as the personal motivations of German chancellor Angela Merkel. You would investigate factors at the system level (such as economic indicators, refugee flows, the attitude of key partners) and at the individual level (such as Merkel's ideological background, her interests and perceptions of the problem as it emerges from statements and key decisions throughout her career). Each would contribute to an overall explanation, but you would need to be prepared to look at different sets of information.

From the 1950s onwards, more and more IR scholars endeavoured to specify the focus of their analysis more clearly. The most

prominent example was Kenneth Waltz's *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (1959) which introduced an analytical framework for the study of IR that distinguished between what he referred to as different 'images' of an issue: the individual, the state and the international system. Waltz's contributions to the discipline generated interest in analysing the international system as a place of interactions between states. From this perspective, the global system is conceived of as the structure or context within which states cooperate, compete and confront each other over issues of national interest. You might visualise it as a level above the state. Particularly important in that context is the distribution of power amongst states, meaning, whether there is one main concentration of power ('unipolarity'), two ('bipolarity') or several ('multipolarity'). Global circumstances are seen to condition the ability and opportunity of individual states and groups of states to pursue their interests in cooperative or competitive ways. The view of states being embedded in a global context traditionally comes with the assumption that our international system is 'anarchic'. An anarchic system is one that lacks a central government (or international sovereign) that regulates and controls what happens to states in their dealings with each other.

Although this idea of the global or system level as a context of anarchy features in many contributions to the IR literature, the main focus remains on the state as the dominant unit of analysis. This enduring focus on the state, and therefore, on the state level of analysis, is referred to as the relative 'state-centrism' of the discipline. This means that IR scholars would generally not only regard states as the central unit of analysis as such, they also conceive of the state as a point of reference for other types of actors. From this perspective, the state acts as the arena in which state officials, politicians and decision-makers operate. The state is seen as the framework that encapsulates society and as the main point of reference for the individual. This predominant focus on the state is strongly related to an assumption IR scholars have made about the state also being the main location of power within the international sphere. This idea that the state is where power is primarily concentrated and located has to be seen against the historical context within which some of the most prominent IR scholars operated – the Cold War. It was an era in which much of international affairs appeared to be run via state channels and in line with particular state interests. Other actors that we would consider important from today's perspective, such as those explored in later chapters in this book, seem to have had little leverage during the Cold War. This was because the period was dominated by great power confrontation and overwhelming military might on each side of the systemic conflict.

Although the Cold War has long since passed, a lot of today's political life remains managed in the state framework, based on issues like national security, domestic cohesion or internal stability. States form the primary kind of actor in major international organisations such as the United Nations, they feature prominently in the global discourse on most of the major challenges of our time, and states still hold what famous German sociologist Max Weber called the monopoly on violence – the exclusive right to the legitimate use of physical force. States continue to matter and thus have to be part of our considerations about what happens in the world and why. The state as a unit of analysis and frame of reference will certainly not go away any time soon, nor will the interactions of states as a key level of analysis in IR.

IR as arena or process?

It is important to highlight that thinking from the point of view of different – and to a degree, separate – levels of analysis as discussed up to this point has been contested by some. Leftwich (2004), for instance, has argued that thinking of international politics as something that takes place in a certain site or location is just one possible way of looking at things. He calls this the 'arena' approach given the way in which it focuses on the location, or 'locus' of interactions, on different platforms that provide the stage to particular events and instances of international relations. He distinguishes this 'arena' approach from what he calls the 'processual' approach, which assumes that international relations should not primarily be looked at as something that happens in a particular location or at a particular level of analysis but that it can instead be thought of as a complex web of processes that takes place between people.

Some theoretical approaches have what is often an implicit preference for a conception of IR as a process rather than an arena with various distinctive levels. This is because they aim to highlight the meaning of interactions as opposed to the meaning of physical structures and locations, such as the state or particular institutions within states. An example of such a perspective can be found in environmentalism or so-called 'Green Politics', which traditionally refuses to think of the practice of international relations as something that can be studied at different 'levels' of analysis. This is mainly because analysts pertaining to this approach perceive any proposed division of political reality into arenas or any attempts at physically locating a problem in a particular context as arbitrary and misleading. They would also argue that thinking in those divisions conveys a false sense of structure, when all aspects of any societal challenge are fundamentally interconnected and should thus be studied in a 'holistic' way – meaning, in conjunction with each other.

Another example of such a theoretical approach is feminism, which would argue that politics does not exclusively occur in public places such as state institutions and international organisations. Feminists would instead argue that 'the personal is the political', meaning that all human interactions carry and reproduce political meaning, and are therefore part of the intricate

process of global affairs. Other thinkers would even go as far as to suggest that politics as a process is not even confined to the human species. Frans de Waal (1982) argues that even the interactions between animals, such as chimpanzees, can carry political meaning and should thus not be excluded from any intellectual accounts of politics including its international and global dimensions.

We will not develop these kinds of perspectives further at this point, but it is nevertheless useful to note how such contentions challenge any assumption of there being any kind of clear cut structure or specific levels of analysis that we can rely on as students and analysts of IR. Regardless of perspective, it is important to be aware of the multiplicity of actors and processes that make up the global system. Reminding ourselves of the complexity of international relations equips us with the ability to recognise any overgeneralisations as they are being presented to us by the media, by political leaders, activists, pressure groups and through our social networks, making us more informed, nuanced and rounded in our thinking.

Beyond the state

While the legacy of conventional Cold War-style thinking still looms large in contemporary analyses, researchers have been interested in developing non-state-centric and more fluid perspectives. We already mentioned environmentalism and feminism as examples of analytical perspectives that acknowledge the importance of actors other than the state, and the role of individuals in particular. Some analysts have not completely abandoned the state perspective but suggest looking into what exactly it is inside states that might be contributing to what happens in the global sphere. This could be related to their internal characteristics, such as their form of government, their economic profile, their cultural and ideological composition or their demography. This perspective includes a distinctive focus on the societies that make up a specific state as much as particular groups and individuals within those societies. Many analysts invite their readers to open the 'black box' that way. In other words, to break up the conventional IR habit of treating states as secluded units and containers of power, politics and societies. They also openly challenge the assumption that there is such a thing as 'unitary' state action. They would dispute, for instance, that 'Germany' – as a nation-state – would push for austerity measures in Greece. Rather, they would insist that related policies are initiated by specific German politicians that advocate such measures out of a particular sentiment, out of an individual interpretation of current developments, or for reasons that might be linked to their own political future or specific preferences of their electorate.

Apart from a focus on the individual and group level of official decision-making, this 'sub-state' (meaning, 'below the state') level of analysis also attempts to expand the scope of scholarly investigation beyond formal interactions of the state, its official representatives and of its constituent parts to include informal relationships and non-official exchanges, such as flows and transfers of goods, information, communications, services and people – above and below the purview of the state.

Contemporary IR is interested in looking at actors that operate across state borders instead of being specifically confined by them – for instance, citizens of a particular state or proponents of a particular ethnic or cultural minority within that state. The study of IR has gradually widened to include all kinds of interactions between a variety of actors, including the general public and individual members of it, people like you and me.

Such an analytical move seems welcome if we think of how potent the influence of individual actors can be that do not officially represent or act on behalf of states or any of their constituent parts. An example of this is the activist Julian Assange, who spearheaded a widely publicised whistleblowing campaign leaking government secrets via the website WikiLeaks. Another example is Osama Bin Laden, who built a global terrorist network (Al Qaeda) based on his own religious and political visions. Both Assange and Bin Laden, although very different in nature, have had lasting impact on top-level global politics from the position of a private persona with no official political status or role.

What is significant in this context is that the traditional conception of the state as the main framework of political interaction and the main point of reference for both society and the individuals within it has lost a lot of its meaning and importance. If we look at the world around us, state borders do not seem to accurately delimitate global affairs. The majority of global interactions – be they related to global finance, production, education, personal and professional travel, labour migration or terrorism – no longer occur via state channels the way they once did. We could say that the increased focus on non-state actors and cross-border issues has marked a close-to-revolutionary turn in IR; something that could be interpreted as a shift away from the inter-national ('between-states') to the 'trans-national' ('across/beyond-states' and their borders). Robert Keohane, one of the leading scholars in the field, recently stated that 'International Relations' is no longer a suitable label and that we should instead refer to the discipline as 'Global Studies' or 'World Politics' (Keohane 2016). In today's world, few societal and political issues, challenges and problems are neatly confined by the borders of individual states or even groups of states. Thinking about world affairs in 'transnational' rather than in purely 'inter-national' terms therefore seems more of an analytical necessity than just a choice.

Individuals and groups interact across borders and thus relativise the meaning of space and territory as conventional IR knew

it. International commercial aviation and the rapid spread of information technologies has further increased people's mobility and the rate at which interactions occur across and beyond state borders. The ability for common people to store, transfer and distribute large amounts of information, the possibility for data to travel across the world in virtually no time, and the increasing availability of high-speed internet have not only changed lives at personal and community levels but also dramatically altered the general dynamics in politics and global affairs.

Social media provide accessible platforms of communication that allow for the projection and promotion of ideas across borders at virtually no cost to the individual or group generating and advocating them. Various political agendas – be they progressive, revolutionary or outright dangerous – can unfold in a relatively uncontrolled and unregulated way, posing real challenges to governmental agencies and the political leaders that try to improve and direct them. Random individuals can potentially start a revolution from their homes, bypassing any conventional conceptions of power and transcending spatial and material boundaries to the point where political activity and even confrontation become weightless and immaterial altogether. A powerful illustration of this can be found in Thomas Neuwirth, an Austrian singer, who is most commonly known by the stage persona 'Conchita Wurst'. The political messages displayed during a show at the Sydney Opera House in March 2016 multiplied and spread through social media. This eventually urged various representatives of the Australian government to take a stance on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues and also gave momentum to the global LGBT movement. A national politician from, say, Austria, would likely not have been able to influence the domestic debate in Australia to that extent, let alone spark a worldwide debate that way.

IR and you

This chapter has introduced you to the idea of levels of analysis as an analytical device that makes the variety of issues in IR more manageable and structured. More specifically, we distinguished between the system level, the state level, the group and the individual level, highlighting differences as well as connections between them. We have shown that the academic discipline of IR has gradually moved away from a dominant focus on the state and the system to deal more with the role and perspective of groups and individuals. As you are reading this book it should be an inspirational thought that never in the history of humanity has it been easier for individuals like you to become directly involved in the practice of international relations, or should we say transnational relations. As an individual you are not just a passive subject of international relations as directed by political elites and official state actors; you have the means of being an actor in your own right – or at the very least being counted as more scholars focus beyond the narrow confines of the state level of analysis.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the difference between empirical and normative theoretical perspectives.
2. What are the levels of analysis? Why is it important to be aware of them when doing analysis of world politics?
3. How might the levels of analysis impact the study of the foreign policy of any particular state?
4. What is meant by the shift from an international to a transnational perspective in IR?

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Key Terms and Definitions

- **Anarchy:** A concept in International Relations describing the lack of a central governing authority in the international system, leading to a self-help environment where states prioritize their own security.
- **Autocracy:** a form of government (including absolute monarchy and dictatorship) in which absolute power (economic, social, and political) is held by one person, the autocrat.
- **Balance of Power:** A concept in International Relations where power is distributed among several states to prevent any one state from dominating the others, thereby maintaining stability in the international system.
- **Bipolar:** A power structure in the international system where two dominant states or coalitions of states hold significant power, often leading to competition and rivalry, as seen during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.
- **Bureaucratic Organizations:** The various agencies and departments within a state that influence foreign policy decisions through their specialized knowledge and interests. They often engage in internal bargaining to shape the state's international behavior.
- **Democracy:** A system of government where power is vested in the people, typically exercised through elected representatives, ensuring political participation, individual rights, and rule of law.
- **Foreign Policy:** A state's strategy in dealing with other nations, reflecting the state's goals and the methods used to achieve them in the international arena.
- **Individual Level:** The level of analysis that focuses on the personal characteristics, decisions, and actions of key leaders and decision-makers, and how these factors influence state behavior.
- **Interest Groups:** Organized groups within a state that seek to influence public policy, including foreign policy, to reflect their specific interests and agendas.
- **International System Level:** The level of analysis that considers the broad structural factors in the global environment, including the distribution of power, international norms, and the anarchic nature of the international system.
- **Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs):** Institutions composed of multiple states that work together within a specific set of rules to address common international issues.
- **Levels of Analysis:** Frameworks used in International Relations to categorize the different factors influencing global events, divided into the individual, state, and international system levels.
- **Multipolar:** A power structure in the international system where multiple states hold significant power, often leading to a more complex and potentially unstable balance of power.
- **Political Institutions:** Structures and systems within a state, such as legislatures, executives, and judiciaries, that shape the creation and implementation of public policy, including foreign policy.
- **Public Opinion:** The collective preferences and attitudes of the population within a state, which can influence government decisions, including those related to foreign policy.
- **Regime Type:** The form or system of government in a state, such as democracy, autocracy, or dictatorship, which influences its foreign policy behavior.
- **Security Dilemma:** A situation where one state's efforts to increase its security lead other states to feel threatened, often resulting in an arms race or increased tensions.
- **Self-Help:** The principle that states must rely on their own resources and strategies for survival in an anarchic international system.
- **State Level:** The level of analysis that examines the internal characteristics of states, such as political institutions, domestic politics, and national interests, and how these influence foreign policy.
- **Unipolar:** A power structure in the international system where a single state holds predominant power, often leading to a period of stability or dominance by that state.

2.8: Additional Readings

Scholarly Resources

Dessler, David. 1989. "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" *International Organization*. Vol 43, No. 3: 441-473.

Singer, J. David. 1961. "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations." *World Politics*. Vol. 14, No. 1: 77-92.

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2.9: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 2

1. What are the levels of analysis?
2. Describe the individual, state, and system levels of analysis.
3. What does it mean to say the levels of analysis interact?
4. How do the levels of analysis help us to understand complex international events?
5. Examine a current international situation from an individual, state, and system level of analysis.

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3: REALISM

Introduction

Realism is one of the oldest and most influential theories in the field of International Relations (IR), offering a lens through which to understand the behavior of states in an anarchic global system. Rooted in a pragmatic approach to international politics, realism emphasizes the role of power, national interest, and the competitive nature of international interactions. This chapter explores the foundational principles of realism, its key thinkers, and its relevance to contemporary global issues.

Learning Objectives

- Identify the core principles and key concepts of Realism.
- Demonstrate how Realism can be applied to events in international relations.
- Evaluate the potential strengths and weaknesses of Realism as a theoretical framework.

3.1: Core Principles

3.2: Historical Foundations

3.3: Realism in the 20th Century

3.4: Key Concepts

3.5: Realism in Practice

3.6: Criticisms and Limitations

3.7: Conclusion

3.8: Deeper Dive- IR Theories

3.9: Glossary

3.10: Additional Readings

3.11: Discussion Questions

3.1: Core Principles

Introduction to Core Ideas

Realism is built on several key assumptions about the nature of the international system and the behavior of states within it. Realists argue that the international system is inherently anarchic, meaning there is no overarching authority to enforce rules or norms. This lack of a global governing body creates a self-help system where states must rely on their own resources and strategies to ensure their survival. The absence of a central authority leads to a world where conflict is always a possibility, and cooperation is difficult to achieve and sustain. According to realism, states are the principal actors in international relations. While other entities, such as international organizations or non-state actors, may play roles, their influence is limited compared to that of sovereign states. The actions of states are driven by their pursuit of power and security in a competitive international environment. Realists believe that the primary goal of every state is to ensure its own survival by maximizing its power relative to other states (relative power). Power is often viewed in terms of military capabilities, economic strength, and political influence. In this zero-sum game, one state's gain is often seen as another state's loss, leading to constant competition and the potential for conflict. Realists are often skeptical of the role of ideology, morality, or international norms in shaping state behavior. Instead, they argue that states act primarily in their own national interest, which is defined by the need to maintain and enhance their power and security. This pragmatic approach leads realists to prioritize the interests of the state over ethical considerations or global cooperation.

3.2: Historical Foundations

Introduction to Key Theorists

The roots of Realism can be traced back to ancient political thought and historical writings. Key figures such as Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Thomas Hobbes have profoundly influenced the development of Realist theory. Often regarded as the father of Realism, Thucydides was an ancient Greek historian who chronicled the Peloponnesian War. His work emphasized the inevitability of conflict in a world driven by the pursuit of power and the security dilemmas faced by states, particularly in "The Melian Dialogue." Thucydides' insights into the nature of power and human behavior have been foundational to realist thought. A Renaissance political theorist, Machiavelli is best known for his work *The Prince*, which offered pragmatic advice to rulers on how to maintain power and security. Machiavelli argued that leaders must be willing to use deception, manipulation, and force when necessary to protect the state, a perspective that aligns with the realist emphasis on power and self-interest. Hobbes' concept of the "state of nature," described in his work *Leviathan*, presents a grim view of human existence without a central authority, where life is "nasty, brutish, and short." This idea resonates with the Realist portrayal of the international system as anarchic, where states, like individuals in the state of nature, must fend for themselves in a hostile environment.

3.3: Realism in the 20th Century

Introduction to Realism in the 20th Century

The 20th century saw the formalization and expansion of Realist thought, particularly in response to the global conflicts and political upheavals of the era. Two significant branches of Realism—Classical Realism and Neorealism—emerged during this period, each contributing to the development of the theory. Developed in the aftermath of World War II, Classical Realism is grounded in the belief that human nature drives states to seek power and act in their own self-interest. Hans Morgenthau, a leading Classical Realist, argued that international politics is governed by objective laws rooted in human nature. According to Morgenthau, political leaders must prioritize the national interest over moral considerations to ensure the survival and security of the state. In the 1970s, Kenneth Waltz introduced Neorealism, also known as structural realism, which shifted the focus from human nature to the structure of the international system. Waltz argued that the anarchic nature of the international system, rather than the characteristics of individual states or leaders, drives state behavior. Neorealism emphasizes the distribution of power among states as the primary factor influencing international relations, with the balance of power being a central concept.

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3.4: Key Concepts

Introduction to Key Ideas

Realism encompasses several important concepts that help explain how states interact in the international system. The concept of anarchy in Realism refers to the lack of a central authority in the international system, which forces states to rely on themselves for security and survival. In this self-help system, states must be constantly vigilant and prepared to defend their interests, as there is no external entity to provide protection or enforce rules. The balance of power theory suggests that states seek to prevent any one state from becoming too powerful by forming alliances and building up their own capabilities. The goal is to maintain an equilibrium where no single state or coalition can dominate the international system. This balancing behavior is seen as essential to preserving stability and preventing conflict. The security dilemma arises when one state's efforts to increase its security lead other states to feel threatened, prompting them to also increase their security measures. This cycle of action and reaction can lead to an arms race or escalate tensions, even when no state actually desires conflict. The security dilemma highlights the unintended consequences of state actions in an anarchic system. Polarity refers to the distribution of power within the international system, which can be unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar. In a unipolar system, one state (the hegemon) dominates; in a bipolar system, two states hold the majority of power; and in a multipolar system, power is distributed among three or more states. The type of polarity in the international system significantly influences the dynamics of international relations. Game theory conceptualizes how political actors, particularly states, make decisions to achieve optimal outcomes. States weigh risks and rewards, basing decisions on available information to maximize their benefits. However, if the information is flawed, the chosen course of action may fail. By analyzing variables and expected outcomes, one can estimate the likelihood of a state's decision or policy response to another's actions.

3.5: Realism in Practice

Introduction to Realism in Practice

Realism has had a profound impact on the practice of international relations and continues to inform the policies and strategies of states today. Several real-world examples illustrate the application of Realist principles. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union is a classic example of bipolarity and the balance of power in action. Both superpowers engaged in a strategic competition for global influence, forming alliances (e.g., NATO and the Warsaw Pact) and engaging in proxy wars to maintain their respective spheres of influence. The doctrine of deterrence, based on the threat of mutually assured destruction, exemplifies the Realist approach to maintaining stability in a tense international environment. The 1990-1991 Gulf War demonstrated the Realist principle of collective security, where a coalition of states, led by the United States, responded to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait to restore the balance of power in the region. The coalition's military intervention was driven by concerns over regional stability, access to oil resources, and the need to uphold the norms of state sovereignty and territorial integrity. China's rapid economic and military growth in recent decades has been closely monitored by Realists, who view it as a potential challenger to the existing international order. The United States and other regional powers have responded with strategies aimed at balancing China's influence, such as strengthening alliances in the Asia-Pacific region and increasing military presence in strategic areas. This situation reflects the Realist focus on power dynamics and the potential for conflict in a multipolar world.

3.6: Criticisms and Limitations

Critiques

While Realism remains a dominant theory in International Relations, it has faced significant criticism for its perceived limitations and shortcomings. Critics argue that Realism's emphasis on conflict, power struggles, and self-interest leads to a pessimistic view of international relations, which may overlook opportunities for cooperation and positive change. Realism's focus on the darker aspects of human nature and state behavior is seen by some as overly cynical and self-fulfilling. Realism's state-centric approach is often criticized for neglecting the role of non-state actors, such as international organizations, multinational corporations, and transnational advocacy networks, which play increasingly significant roles in global politics. By focusing primarily on state-to-state interactions, Realism may fail to account for the complexities of the modern international system. Realism has been criticized for its inability to predict or explain major events that do not fit its framework, such as the end of the Cold War or the rise of global cooperation in addressing issues like climate change. These events challenge the Realist assumption that international relations are driven solely by power and self-interest. Realism's focus on military power as the primary means of ensuring security and achieving national interests has been criticized for downplaying the importance of economic, diplomatic, and cultural forms of influence. In an increasingly interconnected world, where economic interdependence and soft power play significant roles, Realism's emphasis on military might may be seen as outdated.

3.7: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

Realism is a foundational theory in International Relations, offering valuable insights into the behavior of states in an anarchic international system. Its emphasis on power, national interest, and the competitive nature of global politics has shaped the field of IR and continues to do so.

3.8: Deeper Dive- IR Theories

McGlinchey and Gold's "International Relations Theory"

Theories of International Relations allow us to understand and try to make sense of the world around us through various lenses, each of which represents a different theoretical perspective. In order to consider the field as a whole for beginners it is necessary to simplify IR theory. This chapter does so by situating IR theory on a three-part spectrum of traditional theories, middle-ground theories and critical theories. Examples are used throughout to help bring meaning and perspective to these positions. Readers are also encouraged to consult this book's companion text, *International Relations Theory* (forthcoming 2017), which expands greatly on the subject matter of this chapter. Before we get started, one very important note. You may notice that some of the theories you are introduced to here are referred to by names that also occur in other disciplines. Sometimes this can be confusing as, for example, realism in IR is not the same as realism in art. Similarly, you may hear the word 'liberal' being used to describe someone's personal views, but in IR liberalism means something quite distinct. To avoid any confusion, this note will serve as a caveat that in this chapter we only refer to the theories concerned as they have been developed within the discipline of International Relations.

Traditional theories

Theories are constantly emerging and competing with one another. For that reason it can be disorientating to learn about theoretical approaches. As soon as you think you have found your feet with one approach, you realise there are many others. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) set the stage for understanding how and why certain theories are legitimised and widely accepted. He also identified the process that takes place when theories are no longer relevant and new theories emerge. For example, human beings were once convinced the earth was flat and accepted this as fact. With the advancement of science and technology, humans discarded this previously accepted belief. Once such a discovery takes place, a 'paradigm shift' results and the former way of thinking is replaced with a new one. Although changes in IR theory are not as dramatic as the example above, there have been significant evolutions in the discipline. This is important to keep in mind when we consider how theories of IR play a role in explaining the world and how, based upon different time periods and our personal contexts, one approach may speak to us more than another. Traditionally there have been two central theories of IR: liberalism and realism. Although they have come under great challenge from other theories, they remain central to the discipline.

At its height, liberalism in IR was referred to as a 'utopian' theory and is still recognised as such to some degree today. Its proponents view human beings as innately good and believe peace and harmony between nations is not only achievable, but desirable. Immanuel Kant developed the idea in the late eighteenth century that states that shared liberal values should have no reason for going to war against one another. In Kant's eyes, the more liberal states there were in the world, the more peaceful it would become, since liberal states are ruled by their citizens and citizens are rarely disposed to desire war. This is in contrast to the rule of kings and other non-elected rulers who frequently have selfish desires out of step with citizens. His ideas have resonated and continue to be developed by modern liberals, most notably in the democratic peace theory, which posits that democracies do not go to war with each other, for the very reasons Kant outlined.

Further, liberals have faith in the idea that the permanent cessation of war is an attainable goal. Taking liberal ideas into practice, US President Woodrow Wilson addressed his famous 'Fourteen Points' to the US Congress in January 1918 during the final year of the First World War. As he presented his ideas for a rebuilt world beyond the war, the last of his points was to create a general association of nations, which became the League of Nations. Dating back to 1920, the League of Nations was created largely for the purpose of overseeing affairs between states and implementing, as well as maintaining, international peace. However, when the League collapsed due to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, its failure became difficult for liberals to comprehend, as events seemed to contradict their theories. Therefore, despite the efforts of prominent liberal scholars and politicians such as Kant and Wilson, liberalism failed to retain a strong hold and a new theory emerged to explain the continuing presence of war. That theory became known as realism.

Realism gained momentum during the Second World War when it appeared to offer a convincing account for how and why the worst conflict in known history originated after a period of supposed peace and optimism. Although it originated in named form in the twentieth century, many realists have traced its origins in earlier writings. Indeed, realists have looked as far back as to the ancient world where they detected similar patterns of human behaviour as those evident in our modern world. As its name suggests, advocates of realism purport it reflects the 'reality' of the world and more effectively accounts for change in international

politics. Thomas Hobbes is often mentioned in discussions of realism due to his description of the brutality of life during the English Civil War of 1642–1651. Hobbes described human beings as living in an orderless ‘state of nature’ that he perceived as a war of all against all. To remedy this, he proposed that a ‘social contract’ was required between a ruler and the people of a state to maintain relative order. Today, we take such ideas for granted as it is usually clear who rules our states. Each leader, or ‘sovereign’ (a monarch, or a parliament for example) sets the rules and establishes a system of punishments for those who break them. We accept this in our respective states so that our lives can function with a sense of security and order. It may not be ideal, but it is better than a state of nature. As no such contract exists internationally and there is no sovereign in charge of the world, disorder and fear rules international relations. That is why war seems more common than peace to realists, indeed they see war as inevitable. When they examine history they see a world that may change in shape, but is always characterised by a system of what they call ‘international anarchy’ as the world has no sovereign to give it order.

One central area that sets realism and liberalism apart is how they view human nature. Realists do not typically believe that human beings are inherently good, or have the potential for good, as liberals do. Instead, they claim individuals act in their own self-interests. For realists, people are selfish and behave according to their own needs without necessarily taking into account the needs of others. Realists believe conflict is unavoidable and perpetual and so war is common and inherent to humankind. Hans Morgenthau, a prominent realist, is known for his famous statement ‘all politics is a struggle for power’ (Morgenthau 1948). This demonstrates the typical realist view that politics is primarily about domination as opposed to cooperation between states. Here, it is useful to briefly recall the idea of theories being lenses. Realists and liberals look at the very same world. But when viewing that world through the realist lens, the world appears to be one of domination. The realist lens magnifies instances of war and conflict and then uses those to paint a certain picture of the world. Liberals, when looking at the same world, adjust their lenses to blur out areas of domination and instead bring areas of cooperation into focus. Then, they can paint a slightly different picture of the same world.

It is important to understand that there is no single liberal or realist theory. Scholars in the two groups rarely fully agree with each other, even those who share the same approach. Each scholar has a particular interpretation of the world, which includes ideas of peace, war and the role of the state in relation to individuals. And, both realism and liberalism have been updated to more modern versions (neoliberalism and neorealism) that represent a shift in emphasis from their traditional roots. Nevertheless, these perspectives can still be grouped into theory ‘families’ (or traditions). In your studies, you will need to unpack the various differences but, for now, understanding the core assumptions of each approach is the best way to get your bearings.

For example, if we think of the simple contrast of optimism and pessimism we can see a familial relationship in all branches of realism and liberalism. Liberals share an optimistic view of IR, believing that world order can be improved, with peace and progress gradually replacing war. They may not agree on the details, but this optimistic view generally unites them. Conversely, realists tend to dismiss optimism as a form of misplaced idealism and instead they arrive at a more pessimistic view. This is due to their focus on the centrality of the state and its need for security and survival in an anarchical system where it can only truly rely on itself. As a result, realists reach an array of accounts that describe IR as a system where war and conflict is common and periods of peace are merely times when states are preparing for future conflict.

Another point to keep in mind is that each of the overarching approaches in IR possesses a different perspective on the nature of the state. Both liberalism and realism consider the state to be the dominant actor in IR, although liberalism does add a role for non-state actors such as international organisations. Nevertheless, within both theories states themselves are typically regarded as possessing ultimate power. This includes the capacity to enforce decisions, such as declaring war on another nation, or conversely treaties that may bind states to certain agreements. In terms of liberalism, its proponents argue that organisations are valuable in assisting states in formulating decisions and helping to formalise cooperation that leads to peaceful outcomes. Realists on the other hand believe states partake in international organisations only when it is in their self-interest to do so. Many scholars have begun to reject these traditional theories over the past several decades because of their obsession with the state and the status quo.

The middle ground

The thinking of the English school is often viewed as a middle ground between liberal and realist theories. Its theory involves the idea of a society of states existing at the international level. Hedley Bull, one of the core figures of the English school, agreed with the traditional theories that the international system was anarchic. However, he insisted that this does not imply there are no norms (expected behaviours), thus claiming there is a societal aspect to international politics. In this sense, states form an ‘Anarchical Society’ (Bull 1977) where a type of order does exist, based on shared norms and behaviours. Due to its central premise, the English school is often characterised as having an international society approach to IR. This describes a world that is not quite realist and not quite liberal – but rather a world that has elements of both.

Constructivism is another theory commonly viewed as a middle ground, but this time between mainstream theories and the critical theories that we will explore later. It also has some familial links with the English school. Unlike scholars from other perspectives, constructivists highlight the importance of values and shared interests between individuals who interact on the global stage. Alexander Wendt, a prominent constructivist, described the relationship between agents (individuals) and structures (such as the state) as one in which structures not only constrain agents but also construct their identities and interests. His famous phrase ‘anarchy is what states make of it’ (Wendt 1992) sums this up well. Another way to explain this, and to explain the core of constructivism, is that the essence of international relations exists in the interactions between people. After all, states do not interact; it is agents of those states, such as politicians and diplomats, who interact. As those interacting on the world stage have accepted international anarchy as the defining principle, it has become part of our reality. However, if anarchy is what we make of it, then different states can perceive anarchy differently and the qualities of anarchy can even change over time. International anarchy could even be replaced with a different system if a critical mass of other individuals (and by proxy the states they represent) accepted the idea. To understand constructivism is to understand that ideas, or ‘norms’ as they are often called, have power. IR is, then, a never-ending journey of change chronicling the accumulation of the accepted norms of the past and the emerging norms of the future. As such, constructivists seek to study this process.

Critical theories

Critical approaches refer to a wide spectrum of theories that have been established in response to mainstream approaches in the field, mainly liberalism and realism. In a nutshell, critical theorists share one particular trait – they oppose commonly held assumptions in the field of IR that have been central since its establishment. Thus, altered circumstances call for new approaches that are better suited to understand, as well as question, the world we find ourselves in. Critical theories are valuable because they identify positions that have typically been ignored or overlooked within IR. They also provide a voice to individuals who have frequently been marginalised, particularly women and those from the Global South.

Marxism is a good place to start with critical theories. This approach is based upon the ideas of Karl Marx, who lived in the nineteenth century at the height of the industrial revolution. The term ‘Marxist’ refers to individuals who have adopted Marx’s views and believe that society is divided into two classes – the business class (the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat). The proletariat are at the mercy of the bourgeoisie who control their wages and therefore their standard of living. Marx hoped for an eventual end to the class society and overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat. Critical theorists who take a Marxist angle often argue that the internationalisation of the state as the standard operating principle of international relations has led to ordinary people around the globe becoming divided and alienated, instead of recognising what they all have in common as a global proletariat. For this to change, the legitimacy of the state must be questioned and ultimately dissolved. In that sense, emancipation from the state in some form is often part of the wider critical agenda.

Postcolonialism differs from Marxism by focusing on the inequality between nations or regions, as opposed to classes. The effects of colonialism are still felt in many regions of the world today as local populations continue to deal with the challenges created and left behind by the former colonial powers. Postcolonialism’s origins can be traced to the Cold War period when much activity in international relations centred around decolonisation and the ambition to undo the legacies of European imperialism. This approach acknowledges that politics is not limited to one area or region and that it is vital to include the voices of individuals from other parts of the world. Edward Said (1978) developed the prominent ‘Orientalist’ critique, describing how the Middle East and Asia were inaccurately depicted in the West. As a result, more focus within the discipline was placed on including the viewpoints of those from the Global South to ensure that Western scholars no longer spoke on their behalf. This created a deeper understanding of the political and social challenges faced by people living within these regions as well as an acknowledgement of how their issues could be better addressed. Postcolonial scholars are, therefore, important contributors to the field as they widen the focus of enquiry beyond IR’s traditionally ‘Western’ mindset.

Another theory that exposes the inequality inherent in international relations is feminism. Feminism entered the field in the 1980s as part of the emerging critical movement. It focused on explaining why so few women seemed to be in positions of power and examining the implications of this on how global politics was structured. You only need look at a visual of any meeting of world leaders to see how it appears to be a man’s world. Recognising this introduces a ‘gendered’ reading of IR, where we place an issue such as gender as the prime object in focus. If it is a man’s world, what does that mean? What exactly is masculinity as a gender and how has it imposed itself on international relations? As V. Spike Peterson (1992) argues, as long as gender remains ‘invisible’ it may be unclear what ‘taking gender seriously’ means. Once it is recognised that gender is essentially a social construction permeating all aspects of society, the challenges it presents can be better confronted in a way that benefits all individuals. Here, you might be beginning to see some overlaps – with constructivism for example. We are doing our best to present each approach separately so that you have a clearer starting point, but it is wise to caution you that IR theory is a dense and complex web and not always clearly defined. Keep this in mind as you read on, and as your studies develop.

The most controversial of the critical theories is poststructuralism. It is an approach that questions the very beliefs we have all come to know and feel as being 'real'. Poststructuralism questions the dominant narratives that have been widely accepted by mainstream theories. For instance, liberals and realists both accept the idea of the state and for the most part take it for granted. Such assumptions are foundational 'truths' on which those traditional theories rest – becoming 'structures' that they build their account of reality around. So, although these two theoretical perspectives may differ in some respect in regards to their overall worldviews, they share a general understanding of the world. Neither theory seeks to challenge the existence of the state. They simply count it as part of their reality. Poststructuralism seeks to question these commonly held assumptions of reality that are taken for granted, such as the state – but also more widely the nature of power. Jacques Derrida's contribution in this area was in how he showed that you could deconstruct language to identify deeper, or alternative, meanings behind texts. If you can deconstruct language (expose its hidden meanings and the power it has), then you can do the same with fundamental ideas that shape international relations – such as the state. By introducing doubt over why the state exists – and who it exists for – poststructuralists can ask questions about central components of our political world that traditional theories would rather avoid. If you can shake the foundations of a structure, be that a word or an idea, you can move beyond it in your thinking and become free of the power it has over you. This approach introduces doubt to the reality we assume to share and exposes the often thin foundations that some commonly held 'truths' stand upon.

Theory in practice: examining the United Nations

The United Nations (UN) is a highly respected international organisation created at the conclusion of the Second World War from the ashes of the League of Nations. Although it continues to exist, many doubt its claims to success. The United Nations General Assembly is an organ that provides every country with a seat at the table. However, the United Nations Security Council is where power ultimately resides. The Security Council has ten elected non-permanent members, each with their own vote. More importantly, the Security Council also contains five permanent members – the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom – reflecting the victors of the Second World War who stood dominant in 1945 as the United Nations was created. Any of those five permanent members can, through the use of a veto, stop any major resolution.

The United Nations does not possess complete power over states. In other words, it has limited authority to interfere in domestic concerns since one of its main purposes has generally been to mediate diplomatically when issues between countries arise. To better understand this last point, one can point to the challenges faced by the UN's peacekeepers, who comprise civilian, police and military personnel positioned in areas of conflict to create conditions for lasting peace. Irrespective of any actual desire to maintain peace in a certain area, peacekeepers are typically only permitted to apply force in matters of self-defence. This draws on the common (though not always accurate) description of the United Nations as 'peacekeeper' rather than 'peacemaker'. For these reasons, among others, it is possible to argue that the United Nations as an organisation is merely symbolic. At the same time, despite its limited ability to influence heads of state or prevent violence, it is also possible to argue that many nations have benefitted from its work. Aside from its mission to maintain peace and security, the United Nations is also committed to promoting sustainable development, protecting human rights, upholding international law, and delivering humanitarian aid around the world.

From a theoretical point of view, the effectiveness and utility of the United Nations differs depending on which perspective we choose to adopt. Liberals tend to have faith in the capacity of international organisations, primarily the United Nations, along with others organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Health Organization and the World Bank, to uphold the framework of global governance. International organisations may not be perfect, but they help the world find alternatives to war through trade and diplomacy (among other things), which are staples of the liberal account of IR. On the other hand, middle-ground theories such as constructivism focus on ideas and interests. As constructivists focus often on the interactions of elite individuals, they see large organisations like the United Nations as places where they can study the emergence of new norms and examine the activities of those who are spreading new ideas.

Realists, although they do not reject the United Nations completely, argue that the world is anarchic and states will eventually resort to war despite the efforts of international organisations, which have little real authority. Generally, realists believe that international organisations appear to be successful when they are working in the interests of powerful states. But, if that condition is reversed and an organisation becomes an obstacle to national interests, then the equation may change. This line of enquiry is often used by realists to help explain why the League of Nations was unsuccessful – failing to allow for Germany and Japan's expansionist desires in the 1930s. A contemporary example would be the United States invading Iraq in 2003 despite the Security Council declining to authorise it. The United States simply ignored the United Nations and went ahead, despite opposition. On the other hand, liberals would argue that without the United Nations, international relations would likely be even more chaotic – devoid of a respectable institution to oversee relations between states and hold bad behaviour to account. A constructivist would look at the very same example and say that while it is true that the United States ignored the United Nations and invaded Iraq, by doing so it violated the standard practices of international relations. The United States disregarded a 'norm'

and even though there was no direct punishment, its behaviour was irregular and so would not be without consequence. Examining the difficulties the United States faced in its international relations following 2003 gives considerable weight to the constructivist and liberal viewpoints.

In contrast to liberals and constructivists, who value the United Nations to an extent, critical theories offer different perspectives. Marxists would argue that any international body, including the United Nations, works to promote the interests of the business class. After all, the United Nations is composed of (and was built by) states who are the chief protagonists in global capitalism – the very thing that Marxism is opposed to. Likewise, the United Nations can be said to be dominated by imperial (or neo-imperial) powers. Imperialism, according to Marxist doctrine, is the highest stage of capitalism. The United Nations, then, is not an organisation that offers any hope of real emancipation for citizens. Even though it may appear humanitarian, these actions are merely band-aids over a system of perpetual state-led exploitation that the United Nations legitimises.

Poststructuralists would seek to question the meanings behind the role of the United Nations and the arbitrary power structure of the Security Council. They would also look at how key terms are used by the United Nations and what they mean. For example, examining the wording of concepts like ‘peacekeepers’ and ‘peacekeeping’ as opposed to ‘peace-making’ and ‘peace-enforcing’. Or similarly, ‘collective security’ versus ‘international security’: poststructuralists would be sceptical as to whether these terms really differ in meaning and would point to the power of language in advancing the agenda of the United Nations – or perhaps that of the powerful states controlling it. Even the name of the dominant organ of the United Nations – the ‘Security’ Council – begs the question, security for whom? A critique here would point out that at its core, the United Nations is primarily concerned with facilitating the *national* security of powerful states rather than *human* security. In instances like these, the tools that poststructuralism provides to deconstruct and analyse wording have real value.

Feminists would look to how those in positions of power, whether politicians or those working for the United Nations such as officials and delegates, perpetuate a discourse of masculinity. Alternative feminine perspectives are still not adequately recognised and those in decision-making positions of power continue to be disproportionately male. Many countries that make up the United Nations marginalise the feminine voice domestically and thus perpetuate this at the international level. This is especially true of states where women hold more traditional roles in society and are therefore less likely to be considered suitable for what may be traditionally viewed as masculine roles, such as a delegate or ambassador.

Finally, postcolonialists would argue that the discourse perpetuated by the United Nations is one based on cultural, national or religious privilege. They would suggest, for instance, that, as it has no African or Latin American permanent members, the Security Council fails to represent the current state of the world. Postcolonialists would also point to the presence of former colonial powers on the Security Council and how their ability to veto proposals put forward by other countries perpetuates a form of continued indirect colonial exploitation of the Global South.

Hopefully, this brief reading of the United Nations from these varied perspectives has opened your eyes to the potential of IR theory as an analytical tool. We have barely scratched the surface, but it should be clear why so many divergent views are needed in IR and how, in a basic sense, they may be applied.

Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed the main approaches in IR theory, each of which possesses a legitimate, yet different, view of the world. It is important to note that the theories listed in this chapter are not exhaustive and there are many more that could be examined. However, this is a good starting point for achieving an overall understanding of the field and where the most common approaches are situated. Hopefully this has helped you consider your own theoretical inclination – or at least piqued your interest in determining where you might stand. It is not necessary to adopt one theory as your own. But it is important to understand the various theories as tools of analysis that you can apply in your studies. Using a theory to critique an issue, as this chapter did with the United Nations, is to understand the reason why these theories exist. Simply, they offer a means by which to attempt to understand a complex world. As international relations has grown in complexity, the family of theories that IR offers has grown in number. Due to its complexity and diversity, it is common for newcomers to have some difficulty in grasping IR theory, but this chapter should give you the confidence to get started.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe Liberalism in terms of its views of human nature, war/conflict, and the possibility of peace/cooperation.
2. Describe Realism in terms of its view of human nature, war/conflict, and the possibility of peace/cooperation.
3. Describe the Marxist theoretical perspective on international relations in terms of class, the state, and the international system of states.

4. Describe the Feminist theoretical perspective on international relations in terms of gender relations, masculinity, male over-representation, and the possibilities for peace and cooperation.
5. Interpret the United Nations from a Liberal, Constructivist, Realist, Marxist, Poststructuralist, Feminist, and Postcolonialist perspective.

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Key Terms and Definitions

- **Actor:** Actors in international relations are the entities that make international relations work.
- **Classical Realism:** A branch of realism that emphasizes the role of human nature in driving state behavior, often associated with thinkers like Hans Morgenthau.
- **Deterrence:** A strategy aimed at preventing an adversary from taking an undesirable action by threatening significant retaliation, often used in the context of military power.
- **Game Theory:** A way of conceptualizing what motivates a political actor in terms of the steps the actor takes to reach what they deem to be the optimal outcome for themselves.
- **Hegemon:** A state that holds predominant power in a unipolar system and is capable of setting the rules and norms for the international system.
- **National Interest:** The strategic goals and objectives of a state, often centered around ensuring security, power, and survival in the international system.
- **Neorealism (Structural Realism):** A branch of realism that emphasizes the structure of the international system, particularly its anarchic nature, as the primary determinant of state behavior, associated with Kenneth Waltz.
- **Niccolò Machiavelli:** A Renaissance political theorist known for his work *The Prince*, which provides pragmatic advice on maintaining power, often referenced in discussions of realism.
- **Power:** The ability of a state to influence others and achieve its objectives, often measured in terms of military, economic, and political strength.
- **Proxy Wars:** Conflicts in which each of the warring parties is supported and funded by a larger party who has a vested interest in the outcome.
- **Realism:** A theoretical approach in International Relations that emphasizes the competitive and conflictual aspects of international politics, focusing on power, self-interest, and the inevitability of conflict.
- **Relative Power:** The measure of power a state has in comparison to other states, crucial in determining a state's behavior in the international system.
- **State:** The primary actor in the international system according to realism, possessing sovereignty and the ability to make decisions independently of external forces.
- **State of Nature:** A concept in political philosophy describing life without a central authority, pre-government.
- **Thucydides:** An ancient Greek historian whose work on the Peloponnesian War is often cited as a foundational text for realist thought.
- **Thomas Hobbes:** A political philosopher known for his concept of the "state of nature," which describes life without a central authority as chaotic and violent, a key idea in realist thought.
- **Zero-Sum Game:** A situation in which one state's gain is equivalent to another state's loss, reflecting the competitive nature of international relations in realism.

3.10: Additional Readings

Scholarly Resources

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3.11: Discussion Questions

Discussion Questions Based on Chapter 3

1. What are the core principles of Realism?
2. Define Classical Realism and Neorealism and explain how they are related.
3. What are the key concepts of Realism? Be sure to discuss anarchy and self help, balance of power, the security dilemma, polarity, and game theory.
4. Do you find the section 3.5 examples of Realism in practice compelling?
5. Do the criticisms and limitations outlined in section 3.6 undermine the value of Realism as a theory?

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4: LIBERALISM

Introduction

Liberalism, as a theory in International Relations (IR), stands in contrast to Realism by offering a more optimistic outlook on global interactions. Where Realism sees the international system as inherently conflictual and dominated by power struggles, Liberalism emphasizes cooperation, interdependence, and the role of international institutions in mitigating conflict and fostering peace. This chapter explores the foundational principles of Liberalism, its evolution, and its impact on the study and practice of international relations.

Learning Objectives

- Define the core principles and key concepts of Liberalism.
- Demonstrate how Liberalism can be applied to events in international relations.
- Evaluate the potential strengths and weaknesses of Liberalism as a theoretical framework.

4.1: Core Principles

4.2: Historical Development

4.3: Liberalism in Practice

4.4: Classical Liberalism vs. Neoliberal Institutionalism

4.5: Criticisms and Limitations

4.6: Conclusion

4.7: Deeper Dive- Global Civil Society

4.8: Glossary

4.9: Additional Readings

4.10: Discussion Questions

4.1: Core Principles

Introduction to Main Themes

Liberalism is grounded in several key assumptions about the nature of the international system and the behavior of states. Liberalism is fundamentally optimistic about the potential for cooperation among states. It posits that, unlike the constant state of competition described by Realism, states can and do cooperate to achieve mutual benefits. This cooperation is facilitated by international institutions, economic interdependence, and the spread of democratic governance. Liberalism places significant importance on international institutions, such as the United Nations, NATO, and the World Trade Organization. These institutions help to regulate state behavior, reduce the likelihood of conflict, and provide a platform for resolving disputes peacefully. According to Liberal theory, these institutions are essential for maintaining global order and fostering cooperation among states. Economic ties between states are seen as a key factor in reducing the likelihood of conflict. Liberalism suggests that states with strong economic links are less likely to go to war with each other, as conflict would disrupt trade and economic prosperity. This idea is often encapsulated in the concept of "Commercial Liberalism," which argues that trade promotes peace.

One of the most influential ideas within liberalism is the Democratic Peace Theory, which posits that democracies are less likely to go to war with one another. This is because democratic states are characterized by internal restraints on power, such as free and fair elections and checks and balances, which make war a less attractive option. Furthermore, democracies tend to view each other as legitimate and non-threatening, further reducing the likelihood of conflict.

Liberalism acknowledges the complexities of the modern international system, where a multitude of actors—states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multinational corporations, and non-state actors—interact in various ways. The concept of complex interdependence suggests that these interactions create a web of connections that make conflict less likely and cooperation more beneficial.

4.2: Historical Development

Brief Historical Overview

Liberalism has evolved significantly since its inception, with key thinkers and historical events shaping its principles and application in international relations. The intellectual roots of Liberalism can be traced back to the Enlightenment, a period that emphasized reason, individual rights, and the potential for human progress. Philosophers like Immanuel Kant advocated for perpetual peace through the spread of republican (democratic) governance and the establishment of international institutions.

Liberalism gained significant traction in the early 20th century, particularly with U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's advocacy for the League of Nations following World War I. Wilson's vision was to create an international organization that would prevent future conflicts by fostering cooperation and collective security among states. Although the League ultimately failed to prevent World War II, it laid the groundwork for the development of the United Nations and the broader liberal international order.

After World War II, Liberalism played a central role in shaping the international order. The creation of the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund), and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (which later became the World Trade Organization) reflected Liberal principles of cooperation, economic interdependence, and the rule of law. These institutions were designed to promote peace, stability, and economic growth, and they continue to influence global governance today.

In response to the challenges posed by Realism, Neoliberal Institutionalism emerged as a refined version of Liberalism in the late 20th century. Neoliberal Institutionalism focuses on the role of international institutions in fostering cooperation by reducing the incentives for states to defect from agreements. This approach argues that institutions can help states achieve absolute gains—benefits that all parties share—by promoting transparency, reducing transaction costs, and providing mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement.

4.3: Liberalism in Practice

Introduction to Liberalism in Practice

Liberalism's principles have been applied in various ways throughout history, shaping the policies and strategies of states in the international arena. One of the most prominent examples of Liberalism in practice is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Established in 1949, NATO is a collective security alliance that embodies the liberal principle that states can enhance their security through cooperation and mutual defense. By pooling their resources and committing to defend each other, NATO members deter potential aggressors and promote stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. The European Union (EU) is another example of Liberalism in action. The EU promotes economic integration and cooperation among its member states, reducing the likelihood of conflict through interdependence. The EU's single market, common currency (the euro), and numerous political institutions exemplify how Liberal principles can be institutionalized to create a more peaceful and prosperous region.

Liberalism also emphasizes the importance of promoting democracy and human rights as a means of achieving peace and stability. The United States and other Liberal democracies have often pursued policies aimed at spreading democratic governance and protecting human rights, believing that a world of democracies will be more peaceful and cooperative. Liberalism has also influenced the development of international norms and the practice of humanitarian intervention. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, for example, reflects Liberal ideas about the international community's obligation to intervene when states commit gross human rights violations. While controversial, R2P and similar norms underscore Liberalism's concern with individual rights and the protection of human life.

4.4: Classical Liberalism vs. Neoliberal Institutionalism

Key Differences

Classical Liberalism and Neoliberal Institutionalism share foundational beliefs about the potential for cooperation and the importance of institutions in the international system, but they differ in emphasis and focus. Classic Liberalism places more weight on moral progress and the potential for human nature to drive peace, whereas Neoliberal Institutionalism focuses on how institutions structure interactions to enable cooperation in a competitive international environment.

Rooted in the Enlightenment, Classic Liberalism focuses on the inherent goodness of human nature and the potential for cooperation among states. Early Liberal thinkers, such as Immanuel Kant and John Locke, believed that the spread of democracy, free markets, and international institutions would naturally lead to a more peaceful world. Classic Liberalism emphasizes the moral and normative aspects of international relations, arguing that states are not inherently driven by power and conflict, as Realists suggest, but can work together to achieve common goals.

Emerging in the latter half of the 20th century, Neoliberal Institutionalism is a response to the critiques of Realism and seeks to explain how cooperation can be sustained in a world where states are still primarily concerned with their self-interest. Neoliberal Institutionalism focuses more on how international institutions and regimes facilitate cooperation by reducing uncertainty, providing information, and creating mechanisms for enforcement. Neoliberal Institutionalism argues that states will cooperate not just because of shared values but because institutions make cooperation beneficial and reduce the risks of defection. Prominent scholars like Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye contributed to the development of Neoliberal Institutionalism, highlighting the role of international organizations and economic interdependence in fostering global stability.

4.5: Criticisms and Limitations

Critique

While Liberalism has been influential in shaping international relations, it is not without its critics. Several limitations and challenges to Liberalism have been identified. Critics often argue that Liberalism is overly idealistic and naive in its assumptions about human nature and the potential for cooperation. Realists, in particular, contend that Liberalism underestimates the role of power and self-interest in international relations and overestimates the effectiveness of international institutions in preventing conflict. Liberalism's focus on cooperation and interdependence can sometimes overlook the realities of power asymmetries between states. Critics argue that international institutions and economic interdependence can reinforce existing inequalities, with more powerful states using these mechanisms to their advantage. While Democratic Peace Theory is a central tenet of Liberalism, it has been criticized for its limitations. For example, the theory does not account for conflicts between democracies and non-democracies or for the aggressive behavior of democracies toward weaker states. Additionally, the relatively recent emergence of widespread democracy means that there are few historical cases to test the theory's validity. In the 21st century, Liberalism faces new challenges, including the rise of authoritarianism, nationalism, and populism. These trends have called into question the viability of the Liberal international order and have led some to argue that Liberalism needs to adapt to a changing global landscape.

4.6: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

Liberalism remains a key theoretical framework in International Relations, offering a more optimistic and cooperative vision of global politics than Realism. It emphasizes the potential for states to work together through international institutions, economic interdependence, and shared democratic values to achieve peace and prosperity. While Liberalism has faced criticism and challenges, it continues to be a central force in shaping the international system and the policies of states.

Comparison of Liberalism and Realism

Feature	Liberalism
View of Human Nature	Humans are inherently good and capable of cooperation.
International System	Anarchy exists but can be mitigated through institutions and cooperation
Primary Actors	States, international institutions, NGOs, and other non-state actors.
Main Focus	Cooperation, interdependence, and international institutions.
Role of International Law	Important for fostering cooperation and setting norms.
Economic Interdependence	Viewed as a key factor in reducing conflict and promoting peace.
Democratic Peace Theory	Democracies are less likely to go to war with each other due to shared values and institutional checks.
Approach to Conflict	Emphasizes negotiation, diplomacy, and the use of international organizations to resolve disputes.
View on War	War can be avoided through cooperation and building international norms.
Examples of Application	NATO, European Union, United Nations, and the promotion of democracy rights.

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4.7: Deeper Dive- Global Civil Society

Marchetti's "Global Civil Society"

Patterns of globalisation have challenged the exclusivity of states as actors in international affairs. Globalisation links distant communities and opens up spaces for new social actors. Among the non-state actors benefiting from this change are public-interest-orientated non-governmental actors, often known as civil society groups. Alongside the state, profit-orientated corporate actors and international governmental organisations, these civil society groups complete the mosaic of actors on the international stage.

The standard definition of civil society identifies it as the space outside of government, family and market. A place in which individuals and collective organisations advance allegedly common interests. Civil society organisations can include community groups, non-governmental organisations, social movements, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, media operators, academia, diaspora groups, lobby and consultancy groups, think tanks and research centres, professional associations, and foundations. Political parties and private companies can also be counted as borderline cases. The presence of civil society organisations in international affairs has become increasingly relevant. They have played a role in agenda setting, international law-making and diplomacy. Further, they have been involved in the implementation and monitoring of a number of crucial global issues. These range from trade to development and poverty reduction, from democratic governance to human rights, from peace to the environment, and from security to the information society. Because of these reasons, international relations cannot be fully captured without taking into account the actions of civil society organisations.

Different theoretical perspectives can be used to interpret global civil society. Liberals may understand it as the actor that provides a bottom-up contribution to the effectiveness and legitimacy of the international system as a whole. In essence, it is democracy in action as power is being held to account by the populace. Realists, however, may interpret global civil society as a tool used by the most powerful states to advance their ultimate interests abroad, often promoting and popularising ideas that are key to the national interest. Marxists may see global civil society as political vanguards that can spread a different world view that challenges the dominant order. Finally, some even argue that the concept of civil society as a sphere distinct from the family, state and market remains a Western concept that does not apply easily to societies where the boundaries between these spheres are more blurred. It is useful to keep these various perspectives in mind as you read through the chapter.

Conditions for transnational activism

The activism of global civil society groups has been facilitated by a number of specific conditions. First, a number of international organisations have supported the inclusion of civil society actors within international decision-making. For example, the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro provided a means for previously scattered groups to meet and create common platforms and networks. The European Union has followed a similar approach by integrating different types of civil society organisations within its governance mechanisms. Second, the state's priorities for the allocation of resources changed in the 1980s and 1990s due to a trend towards the privatisation of industries. In that climate, it was common to see state-owned enterprises (such as utilities) being sold off to private companies. For that reason, in many Western nations, the state's overall role in public affairs was reduced. In this context, civil society organisations were able to subcontract many functions from the state and take up new roles as service providers. Third, the globalisation process has generated a sense of common purpose among civil society actors. This has been a trigger for internal unification – increasing the sense of solidarity among civil society organisations. It has also united the groups that want to highlight the negative sides of globalisation. Finally, through the internet, groups from different parts of the world have been able to familiarise themselves with other political realities, like-minded organisations, and alternative forms of action. In this way, they have been able to increase their political know-how and their ability to join forces in addressing common targets.

The wider international system itself has offered an environment conducive to the development of these kinds of activities. By forming transnational networks, civil society organisations have used their leverage at the international level to achieve notable results. A transnational network can be defined as a permanent co-ordination between different civil society organisations (and sometimes individuals), located in several countries, collectively focused on a specific global issue. Major past examples are the Jubilee 2000 campaign, which worked through the 1990s to induce creditor governments and the International Monetary Fund to take steps toward debt relief for highly indebted poor countries. Another is the campaign to ban landmines, which led to the intergovernmental conference in Ottawa where the Mine Ban Treaty was signed in 1997. Ongoing campaigns, to mention a few,

include mobilisation on environmental justice, gender recognition, LGBT rights and food security.

Global civil society as a response to transnational exclusion

In today's complex world, traditional institutions have struggled to provide effective and legitimate responses to global issues such as climate change, financial instability, disease epidemics, intercultural violence and global inequalities. As a response to these shortcomings, forms of so-called multi-level, stakeholder governance have been established that involve a combination of public and private actors. Civil society action at the international level is predominantly focused on building political frameworks with embedded democratic accountability. At present, most global governance bodies suffer from accountability deficits – that is, they lack the traditional formal mechanisms of democratic accountability that are found in states, such as popularly elected leaders, parliamentary oversight, and non-partisan courts. Instead, the executive councils of global regulatory bodies are mainly composed of bureaucrats who are far removed from the situations that are directly affected by the decisions they take. People in peripheral geographical areas and in marginalised sections of society are especially deprived of recognition, voice and influence in most contexts of global governance as it is currently practised. An apt depiction of such an international system is to describe it as characterised by 'transnational exclusion'.

In recent decades most global regulatory bodies have begun to develop closer relations with civil society organisations precisely in order to fill this legitimacy gap. For example, the Committee on World Food Security within the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has reserved seats for different types of organisations, including non-governmental organisations and social movements, research centres, financial institutions, private sector associations and private philanthropic foundations. While the role of civil society organisations in these contexts is predominantly based on a consultative status, they allow the civil society organisations to have a seat at the table.

Given their need to balance a deeper impact on society with greater legitimacy, global governance institutions have been under pressure to be more inclusive and attentive to the political demands coming from below. Thanks to such dynamics, civil society actors have managed to increase their access to international agenda-setting, decision-making, monitoring and implementation in relation to global issues. At the same time, the challenge to the inclusion of civil society actors in global governance mechanisms remains significant. New institutional structures are continually emerging and the challenge in terms of integration is therefore endlessly renewed. New institutional filters are created and civil society actors have to constantly re-focus and adapt to new circumstances. An example is provided by the announcement in 2009 that the main economic council of wealthy nations would shift from the G-8 to the G-20 format. The G-20 meets annually and is composed of 19 states plus the European Union. Together its members account for roughly 80 per cent of the world's trade. In this instance, civil society activists have been lagging behind: activism around the G-8 was intense, but the meetings of the G-20 have only recently attracted a similar level of attention.

Values promotion and creating change

At the core of the dynamics leading to the emergence of transnational activism is the perception of the possibility of change in the area of one specific global issue. This might arise due to a new issue becoming significant or the re-interpretation of a long-standing issue. Ultimately, the key feature of transnational activism in global governance is precisely its stubborn attempt to influence the normative battle on the right and legitimate interpretation of crucial global issues. In this perspective, civil society organisations should be seen not only as traditional problem solvers (providing solutions that governments are less suited to delivering) but also as problem generators (placing new problematic issues on the international agenda). While the perception of an unjust situation necessarily constitutes a precondition for action, it is only when the actor recognises the possibility of having a positive impact on such a situation that mobilisation may start. Two elements are necessary for such mobilisation: conceptualisation and political commitment.

Transnational mobilisation on global issues should be interpreted as the result of several steps. A crucial challenge for any transnational network is to present the issue at stake in such a way that it is perceived as problematic, urgent and also soluble. Think, for instance, of the case of feminism. Through the action of a number of feminist movements, beginning with the suffragettes in the late nineteenth century, the traditional role of women was challenged and eventually replaced by a new egalitarian position entitling women to have equal standing in society. The first step in cross-border mobilisations is therefore the production of knowledge and the creation of 'frames' through which the issue at stake can be correctly interpreted.

A second step consists of the external dissemination and strategic use of such knowledge. This is a crucial stage as it is the point at which information acquires a fully public dimension – and therefore political significance. Global public opinion needs to be attracted and its imagination captured for framing the terms of the conflict in such a way that the issue at stake becomes the

focus of a general interest requiring public engagement. Dissemination often passes through scientific channels. When networks become active players in the communities of experts on global issues, they tend to be perceived by public opinion as credible sources of information and this increases their influence on policymaking. However, dissemination can also be executed through other forms, including public action such as mass protests.

In order to successfully promote change a third step is necessary. The task here consists in gaining a recognised role in the public sphere as a rightful advocate of general interests. To the question 'In whose name do you speak?', transnational networks need to offer a response that enables them to claim representation of interests that are wider than just those of a small group. Once transnational networks succeed in shaping a challenge associated to a particular global issue, the political opportunity for mobilising and network building arises.

Although success necessarily depends on international circumstances, national conditions often play an important role in the rise of global social movements. In national contexts, civil society organisations are rooted in a web of social relations and common identities. They have access to important resources (such as people and money) but operate in highly formalised political systems that shape and constrain their mobilisation and impact through a number of political filters. For instance, while democratic countries tend to leave space for activism, the room for manoeuvre in countries ruled by other kinds of regime may be more limited. At the global level, however, there are few such restrictions. This factor widens the options for political action. In fact, transnational networks may help increase the political opportunities that are present in national contexts; they often perform a facilitating role, providing space for actors who are usually voiceless and excluded. Transnational networks can also amplify local voices by setting them in the context of global issues and policies, thus strengthening local or national activism.

Transnational networks can therefore be understood as organisational responses to the new global socio-political environment in which political opportunities on the one hand and scarce resources (finance, knowledge, etc.) on the other create conditions in which a network structure can perform better than other organisational forms. As this combination is inherently contingent, transnational networks tend to have a limited political life. On the one hand, networks are created in response to a specific issue; it is difficult to adapt them to a different issue and in many cases easier to simply create a new network. On the other hand, social movements and especially networks are cyclical phenomena. The interaction between the set of values shared by social movements and global political opportunities leads to the emergence of different projects of political change, reflecting also the heterogeneity of actors – for instance, balancing reformist with more radical attitudes. Individual networks, therefore, fit a specific set of conditions – internal and external to global movements – but when some of them change, the factors that led to their rise may dissolve, mobilisation may decline rapidly and networks are unlikely to maintain their significance unless they adapt their strategy and at times their own identity to the new political contexts.

Contested legitimacy

While it is clear that civil society organisations cannot aim at replacing the traditional channels of political representation, it is recognised that they often play a key role in 'broadcasting' viewpoints that struggle to be included in the political agenda. From the activist perspective the issue of political representation should not be interpreted as a matter of who they represent but, rather, what they aim to represent. It is the issues they tackle and the values they seek to uphold that are crucial – possibly more than their constituencies. Civil society organisations usually claim to advance the public interest. While it may not be clear what the public interest is with regard to many global issues, the ambition of civil society is, as argued above, to contribute within the normative battlefield of global public opinion. To explore the issue of legitimacy we can look at the two extremes of the civil society spectrum – the divide between mainstream politics and radical groups. At one extreme there are the civil society organisations established by governments and international organisations. At the other we find civil society organisations that are considered criminal, such as terrorist groups and mafia organisations. These represent the two extremes of co-optation and ostracisation. In other words, they are examples of full integration into and full exclusion from the political system.

For groups closer to the mainstream of politics, or those groups seeking to enter the mainstream, there is always the risk of co-optation by the institutional system. Civil society organisations need financial resources, public recognition and political support – all of which can be provided or facilitated by the political system. At the same time, the political system may take advantage of the fragmentation and proliferation of civil society organisations by picking and choosing, on the basis of political convenience, the groups most inclined to cooperate with the current political agenda. In this way, there is a danger that some civil society organisations may find themselves used instrumentally to facilitate top-down representation of specific interests. On the other hand, issues of violence and resistance to political systems are always controversial, depending as they do on political interpretation. To borrow an old phrase, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Those who take an oppositional stand to the status quo and agitate for material changes have often been criminalised and/or politically marginalised. We should always remember that the term 'civil' is normatively loaded and tends to be interpreted in line with the predominant ideology. For this reason, history is at times ironic: prominent political leaders such as South African president Nelson Mandela and Palestinian

leader Yasser Arafat were long considered to be leaders of criminal groups, perhaps even terrorists, and yet in due course they were both awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The case of the moratorium on the death penalty

The goal of abolishing the death penalty is a key aspiration of human rights activism. It is a contemporary example of how initiatives backed by civil society organisations can have lasting impact. While the topic of the death penalty has been debated for centuries, it is only in recent decades that significant institutional changes have occurred, with a number of countries removing capital punishment from their legal systems. The anti-death penalty stance only managed to gain importance at the United Nations level due to the specific transnational mobilisation of civil society organisations. While earlier activism contributed to creating the right political context at the national level, it was the campaign for a moratorium on the death penalty that specifically targeted the United Nations. This ultimately led to a significant UN General Assembly resolution in 2007 that was reconfirmed several times in subsequent years. In themselves, the resolutions and the changed attitude of a number of states are remarkable achievements in terms of human rights promotion, even if the death penalty still remains in some states.

The campaign developed through a multi-stage process of normative promotion. It began in a specific place – Italy. It then became stronger by ‘going transnational’ via civil society organisations networking together and sharing resources and ideas. The campaign then returned to the national domains so that key target states could be persuaded to back it. Finally, the campaign targeted the United Nations, where it successfully achieved the backing of the General Assembly. The dynamics of the process cannot be fully captured without making clear the part played by tactics of persuasion. Humanitarian diplomacy developed by civil society organisations through persuasion activities remains key. In this case the undertaking featured two main components. First, the idea of the right to life was communicated persuasively as a desirable outcome – something that attached well to several already popular international agendas. Second, an empathic process was generated by using powerful narratives drawn from individual cases. These were mainly stories told by people previously sentenced to death and now pardoned, or moving accounts by their relatives. In both cases, civil society organisations played a central role as either reason-based frame creators or emotion-based narrative disseminators. They played an important role as an alternative and/or adjunct to diplomatic politics and achieved a clear and lasting impact at the international level.

Conclusion

Over recent decades, civil society activities have been responsible for a number of important contributions. While this is still far from a decisive move towards a comprehensive democratisation of world politics, the incremental steps should not be underestimated. At least two kinds of impact can be identified. In the first instance, civil society organisations have managed to influence political decision-makers by giving voice to the voiceless and framing new issues. At the same time they have managed to pressurise global governance institutions so that today the overall level of transparency, consultation, outside evaluation and efficiency is measurably higher than it was in the past. Such results cannot be attributed solely to civil society, but they have been achieved in part by civil mobilisations.

Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge that in absolute terms the impact has been modest and uneven (see Scholte 2011). Most transnational activism has come from Western organisations, with significant exceptions in Latin America and Southeast Asia. Other parts of the world are still socially disconnected. Russia, China, most of Africa and the Arab world constitute islands which remain relatively isolated from the general growth of transnational civil society. And just as civil society organisations are unevenly concentrated in the Global North, the political results they have achieved also exhibit geopolitical imbalance. The gains realised by political activism have mostly been in line with agendas framed in northern states and benefitting northern constituencies. However, this is unlikely to continue as agendas arise from the developing world and international Western power and influence gradually declines. In such a climate, Western civil society organisations will have to share the stage with civil society organisations coming from the developing world. This will not always be easy, but it will hopefully make the future global civil society more genuinely ‘global’.

Discussion Questions

1. What is civil society? How is it important? And how is it interpreted/framed by Liberalism and Realism when it comes to international relations?
2. What does Marchetti mean when he writes: “At present, most global governance bodies suffer from accountability deficits”?
3. What does it mean to say global civil society is a response to transnational exclusion?
4. Describe what Marchetti claims are the necessary elements for transnational activism (values promotion and creating change).

5. What are the various challenges for mainstream and oppositional civil society groups?
6. Describe the arc of human rights activism when it comes to abolishing the death penalty. What does Marchetti argue are the reasons for its success?
7. What does Marchetti mean when he writes: “Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge that in absolute terms the impact (of transnational civil society activities) has been modest and uneven”?

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Key Terms and Definitions

- **Collective Security:** A system in which a group of states agrees to cooperate to defend each other against threats or aggression. If one member is attacked, the others are committed to collective defense. This principle is embodied in organizations like NATO.
- **Cooperation:** The process in which states and non-state actors work together to achieve common goals, often facilitated through international institutions, diplomacy, and shared interests. Liberalism emphasizes that cooperation leads to peace and mutual benefit.
- **Democratic Peace Theory:** The theory that democracies are less likely to go to war with each other due to shared norms, political processes, and the checks and balances within democratic governments, which make conflict less likely.
- **European Union (EU):** A political and economic union of European countries that promotes cooperation, economic integration, and the reduction of conflict through interdependence and shared governance.
- **Human Rights:** The fundamental rights and freedoms that all individuals are entitled to, such as freedom of speech, equality before the law, and protection from torture. Liberalism emphasizes the importance of promoting and protecting human rights on the global stage.
- **Institutions:** Formal organizations or mechanisms that govern the behavior of states and other international actors. These include international organizations like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, which play a role in promoting cooperation and reducing conflict.
- **Interdependence:** The mutual reliance between states, particularly in terms of economic and trade relations. Liberalism views interdependence as a factor that reduces the likelihood of conflict, as states are less inclined to engage in wars that would disrupt beneficial economic relationships.
- **International Monetary Fund (IMF):** An international organization that works to stabilize global financial markets, promote international monetary cooperation, and provide financial assistance to countries in need. The IMF is an important institution in the liberal framework, promoting economic stability and cooperation.
- **Liberalism:** A theory in International Relations that emphasizes the potential for cooperation among states through international institutions, economic interdependence, and the spread of democracy. Liberalism promotes the idea that peace and progress can be achieved through collective efforts.
- **NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization):** A military alliance of Western countries established in 1949 for the purpose of collective defense. NATO is an example of liberal principles in action, where states collaborate for mutual security and stability.
- **Neoliberal Institutionalism:** A modern refinement of Liberalism, focusing on the role of international institutions in fostering cooperation. Neoliberal Institutionalism argues that states, while pursuing their self-interest, can achieve mutual benefits through international organizations that help manage interdependence and reduce the likelihood of conflict.
- **Norms:** Shared expectations and standards that govern the behavior of states and other actors in the international system. Norms often guide diplomatic interactions and the conduct of war, and liberalism sees them as essential in promoting peaceful cooperation.
- **Responsibility to Protect (R2P):** A global political commitment that was endorsed by all United Nations member states in 2005 to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. It reflects liberal ideas about the international community's responsibility to protect individuals from gross human rights violations.

4.9: Additional Readings

Scholarly Resources

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4.10: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 4

1. What are the core principles of Liberalism?
2. How did Liberalism evolve over the course of the 20th century?
3. What distinguishes Neoliberal Institutionalism from Classical Liberalism? Be sure to describe how Neoliberal Institutionalism is a response to Realist critics.
4. Discuss examples of Liberalism in practice.
5. Do the criticisms and limitations outlined in section 4.5 undermine the value of Liberalism as a theory?

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5: ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

Introduction

This chapter discusses Constructivism, Marxism, and Feminism, alternative theories to Realism and Liberalism. Constructivism is important because it draws attention to how meaning is created through the interplay of agency and structure. Marxism provides a theory of history and a prescription for political action. Feminism emphasizes intersectionality and the fundamental gender inequities that inform and drive politics. Constructivism, Marxism, and Feminism have each made significant contributions to the study of international relations.

Learning Objectives

- Describe the key concepts of Constructivism, Marxism, and Feminism.
- Indicate how Constructivism, Marxism, and Feminism can be applied to events in international relations.
- Evaluate the potential strengths and weaknesses of Constructivism, Marxism, and Feminism as theoretical frameworks.

5.1: Constructivism

5.2: Marxism

5.3: Feminism

5.4: Conclusion

5.5: Glossary

5.6: Additional Readings

5.7: Discussion Questions

5.1: Constructivism

Introduction to Constructivism

Constructivism is a modern theory in International Relations (IR) that contrasts with traditional approaches like Realism and Liberalism. It emerged as a significant alternative to explain global events, especially after the Cold War, an event that challenged Realist and Liberal assumptions. Constructivism focuses on the social aspects of international relations, emphasizing that the world is shaped by ideas, identities, norms, and the relationships between states. It argues that material power and self-interest alone cannot explain state behavior—what truly matters are the shared meanings and values that arise from interaction between actors.

Social Construction of Reality

One of the fundamental principles of constructivism is that reality in international relations is socially constructed. This means that the international system is not an objective, material reality but is built through the interactions, beliefs, and perceptions of the states within it. According to Alexander Wendt, a leading figure in Constructivist thought, the idea that "anarchy is what states make of it" reflects how states interpret their environment based on social contexts. In this view, material factors like military power or geography gain significance only through the meanings that states assign to them.

For instance, the United States views 500 British nuclear weapons as less threatening than five North Korean nuclear weapons, not because of the physical danger posed but because of the social relationships between the countries. Constructivism thus sees the identities and roles of states as critical to understanding their actions.

Identities and Interests

Constructivists argue that state identities and interests are not fixed or inherent but are shaped through interactions with other states. These identities are crucial because they influence how a state perceives its role in international politics and, therefore, its interests. For example, a small state like Bhutan might prioritize survival due to its perceived identity as a vulnerable actor, whereas a great power like the United States may focus on maintaining global influence.

State behavior is guided by the alignment between its identity and its actions. A state cannot act in ways that contradict its identity, as this would challenge the legitimacy of that identity. This idea helps explain why post-World War II Germany, despite its economic power, embraced a pacifist identity and refrained from re-establishing itself as a military power. Constructivists assert that identities are dynamic and subject to change based on evolving social interactions.

The Role of Norms

Norms are central to Constructivism. They are defined as standards of appropriate behavior for actors with specific identities. Norms guide and shape state actions by creating expectations for how states should behave. For example, the prohibition of slavery or the use of nuclear weapons are norms that have developed through international consensus.

Constructivism also introduces the concept of the "norm life cycle." A norm first emerges, gains acceptance, and eventually becomes internalized by the majority of actors, becoming an expected part of state behavior. The development of climate change mitigation policies, for example, reflects how norms can evolve over time, from initial advocacy by a few states to widespread acceptance across the international community. This dynamic nature of norms highlights the potential for change in the international system.

Agency and Structure

Constructivism departs from traditional theories by emphasizing the mutual constitution of agency and structure. Agency refers to the capacity of actors (states or individuals) to make decisions, while structure encompasses the rules, norms, and institutions that shape international relations. Constructivists argue that structure is not static; it evolves through the actions and decisions of states.

For example, while realists view anarchy as a fixed characteristic of the international system, constructivists argue that anarchy can be understood in different ways depending on how states interact and interpret it. States can reinforce existing structures or change them through their actions, depending on their beliefs and ideas.

5.2: Marxism

Introduction to Marxism

Marxism provides a unique lens for understanding the global political and economic system. Rooted in the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Marxism argues that the global order is shaped by the dynamics of capitalism, which inherently leads to inequality and exploitation. While its popularity has declined since the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Marxism remains a powerful framework for critiquing the capitalist world system and its impact on international relations.

Key Actors and Capitalist Dynamics

Marxism views social classes, multinational corporations (MNCs), and transnational elites as the primary actors in the international system, rather than sovereign states. States, according to Marxist theory, are tools of these elites and are integrated into the capitalist system. They serve to maintain the dominance of the ruling capitalist class and reinforce the global inequalities that arise from capitalism. In this view, states are not independent actors but are shaped by the economic structures in which they operate.

Capitalism, according to Marx, contains the seeds of its own destruction. The relentless pursuit of profit and industrial development creates internal contradictions that lead to social unrest. Marxism posits that workers and marginalized groups, who are exploited by the capitalist system, will eventually rise against their oppressors, leading to a revolutionary transformation of society.

Material Conditions and Dependency Theory

Marxism emphasizes that material economic conditions—how resources, labor, and capital are controlled—are the primary determinants of social and political outcomes. This reductionist view holds that the economic base (the forces and relations of production) shapes the political and social superstructure (laws, institutions, and norms). Thus, international relations cannot be understood without analyzing the underlying capitalist system that drives global inequality.

Dependency theory, a key aspect of Marxist thought, explains how the international system is stratified into core and periphery countries. Core countries, like the United States and the United Kingdom, dominate the global economy by producing high-value goods and maintaining stable political institutions. In contrast, periphery countries in the Global South are often resource-rich but lack the industrial and political infrastructure to compete on the same level. These periphery countries are dependent on the core for economic survival, leading to an exploitative relationship where the core extracts resources and labor from the periphery at minimal cost.

Imperialism and Global Conflict

Vladimir Lenin, a prominent Marxist thinker, argued that imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism. As capitalist powers compete for resources and markets, they are driven to expand their influence globally, often leading to conflicts and wars. Marxists view global imperialism as a byproduct of capitalist competition, where powerful states exploit weaker ones to maintain economic dominance.

In this framework, wars and conflicts are not simply caused by political or territorial disputes but are deeply rooted in the capitalist need to control resources and markets. As core states seek to expand their economic reach, they engage in imperialist actions that further entrench global inequalities.

Class Struggle and the International System

Marxism argues that the global capitalist system creates an international class struggle. On a domestic level, this class struggle occurs between the bourgeoisie (the capitalist class) and the proletariat (the working class), but this conflict extends internationally. Workers across different countries share common interests, as they are all subject to the exploitation of global capitalism. Therefore, Marxism envisions a global proletariat that could unite to challenge the capitalist system.

This international class struggle is key to understanding global politics from a Marxist perspective. It highlights how global capitalism affects all actors in the system, regardless of national boundaries. The exploitation of the periphery by the core is seen as a manifestation of this broader class struggle on an international scale.

5.3: Feminism

Introduction to Feminism

Feminism in IR challenges the traditional, male-dominated perspectives that have historically shaped the field. It critiques how IR theories and practices have often marginalized women and overlooked the gendered dimensions of global politics. Feminist IR scholars argue that gender matters deeply in understanding international affairs, from decision-making to the consequences of conflict. This section explores key feminist critiques of traditional IR theories and the importance of gender in shaping international relations.

Feminist Critiques of Traditional IR

Feminist theory in IR begins by questioning the foundations of traditional theories like Realism and Liberalism, which often prioritize “masculine” values such as power, domination, and competition while neglecting “feminine” values like cooperation, communication, and interdependence. Traditional IR theories tend to overlook the role of women and focus almost exclusively on men’s actions and decisions in international politics. IR has traditionally centered on hard power, conflict, and security, ignoring issues like poverty, education, and gender-based violence, which disproportionately affect women. Feminists ask whether traditional IR theories are truly objective or if they reflect the biases of the male theorists who have largely shaped the field.

Feminist Approaches to IR

Feminist IR theory encompasses different approaches, each with a unique perspective on gender relations and power dynamics. Difference Feminism argues that men and women are fundamentally different and bring different perspectives to international politics. Feminist scholars suggest that incorporating these diverse perspectives can lead to different decision-making styles, particularly in conflict resolution. Liberal Feminism argues that men and women are fundamentally equal and, when given the same opportunities, will behave similarly in positions of power. They focus on increasing women’s participation in international institutions and decision-making processes. Both of these approaches emphasize the need to address the exclusion of women from international politics and challenge the perception that IR is gender-neutral.

The Role of Women in Global Politics

Feminist IR theory highlights how women’s roles and contributions have historically been overlooked in both practice and scholarship. Women have been marginalized in decision-making processes, particularly in areas considered “high politics” like national security, military strategy, and diplomacy. Women’s issues—such as healthcare, education, and gender-based violence—have often been sidelined as “soft issues” in global politics. As women have gained positions of power in the post-World War II era, issues once considered secondary, such as maternal health, poverty, and violence against women, have become central to global policy discussions. Leaders like Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the world’s first female prime minister, have introduced policies that focus on the well-being of women and children alongside national security concerns. Feminist theory has brought attention to these issues, showing that the global political arena is not only about statecraft and power struggles but also about the lives and well-being of marginalized groups, including women.

Gender and Conflict

One of the most significant contributions of feminist IR is its focus on how conflict affects men and women differently. Feminist scholars argue that traditional views of conflict and security overlook the gendered dimensions of violence. Feminist scholars have exposed the prevalence of gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, in conflicts around the world. This type of violence, often targeted specifically at women, was historically ignored or dismissed as an inevitable byproduct of war. Feminist perspectives have also highlighted the intersectionality of gender, race, and class, showing how different groups experience conflict in unique ways. The introduction of the 2002 Rome Statute, which recognized rape as a war crime, represents an important shift towards addressing gendered violence in conflict. However, feminist scholars argue that much work remains to be done in curbing this form of violence.

Feminism's Broader Impact on IR

Beyond addressing gender inequalities, feminist theory has made significant contributions to rethinking the nature of power and global politics. Feminist scholars argue that the personal is political, meaning that gendered experiences of individuals shape broader political outcomes. Feminism has exposed how deeply ingrained gender norms influence the behavior of states and leaders in global politics. By challenging traditional gender roles, feminist theory broadens the scope of IR to include a more diverse range of actors and issues. Intersectionality, a key concept in feminist theory, helps to explain how different identities—such as gender, race, and class—intersect to shape individuals' experiences in international politics.

5.4: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

Alternative theories—Constructivism, Marxism, and Feminism—offer critical perspectives that challenge the traditional dominance of Realism and Liberalism. These approaches expand understanding of global politics by emphasizing the importance of social constructs, economic structures, and gender dynamics. Together, these theories provide a richer, multidimensional understanding of International Relations, pushing the discipline to address complexities that go beyond power politics and economic interdependence.

Key Terms and Definitions

- **Agency:** The capacity of actors (states or individuals) to make decisions in international relations. Constructivists emphasize that actors have the ability to shape and influence the international system through their actions.
- **Capitalism:** An economic system where private ownership of production dominates, and wealth is generated through market competition. In Marxism, capitalism is seen as a system that creates class conflict and global inequality.
- **Constructivism:** A theory in International Relations that focuses on the role of ideas, beliefs, and social interactions in shaping the international system, rather than just material factors like power and economy.
- **Core Countries:** Countries that dominate the global economy by producing high-value goods and maintaining stable political institutions. Core countries often exploit periphery countries for resources and labor.
- **Dependency Theory:** A Marxist theory that explains global inequality by arguing that wealthy, industrialized countries (core countries) exploit less developed countries (periphery countries), keeping them dependent on the core for economic survival.
- **Difference Feminism:** A branch of feminist theory that argues that men and women are fundamentally different and bring unique perspectives to international relations. Feminists in this camp believe that incorporating women's viewpoints can lead to different outcomes, especially in conflict resolution.
- **Economic Base:** The material conditions of society, such as how resources, labor, and capital are controlled. In Marxism, the economic base shapes the social superstructure (laws, politics, and culture).
- **Feminism:** A theory in International Relations that critiques traditional, male-dominated perspectives and highlights the importance of gender, focusing on the marginalization of women and the gendered dimensions of global politics.
- **Global Inequality:** A concept in Marxism that refers to the unequal distribution of wealth and resources between core and periphery countries, exacerbated by capitalism and imperialism.
- **Imperialism:** According to Marxist theory, imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism, where powerful states expand their influence over weaker states to control resources and markets, often leading to conflict and exploitation.
- **Intersectionality:** A feminist concept that explains how different identities (such as gender, race, and class) intersect to shape individuals' experiences and their position within international relations.
- **Karl Marx:** The philosopher and economist whose writings laid the foundation for Marxism, a theory that critiques capitalism and explains how class struggle and economic structures shape global politics and inequality.
- **Liberal Feminism:** A feminist approach that argues for equality between men and women, emphasizing that women should have the same opportunities and access to decision-making positions in international institutions as men.
- **Marxism:** A theory in International Relations that focuses on class struggle, capitalism, and economic structures to explain global inequalities, the exploitation of periphery countries by core countries, and imperialism.
- **Norm Life Cycle:** In constructivism, the process by which norms evolve, beginning with their emergence, then gaining acceptance by a majority of actors, and finally becoming internalized as widely accepted standards of behavior.
- **Periphery Countries:** Countries that are often resource-rich but lack industrial and political infrastructure. These countries depend on core countries for economic survival and are often exploited for their resources and labor.
- **Social Construction:** A key concept in constructivism, it refers to the process by which actors create shared meanings and understandings through social interactions, shaping how they view the international system and their roles within it.
- **Social Superstructure:** According to Marxism, the social superstructure consists of the political, legal, and cultural institutions of society, which are shaped by the underlying economic base (the mode of production and class relations).
- **State Identities:** In constructivism, the identities of states are not fixed but are shaped through interaction with other states. These identities influence a state's interests and behavior in the international system.
- **Structure:** The rules, norms, and institutions that shape international relations and the behavior of states and actors within the system. Constructivism emphasizes that structure is not fixed and can be influenced by the actions of actors.

5.6: Additional Readings

Scholarly Resources

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5.7: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 5

1. What are the core concepts of Constructivism? Be sure to discuss the social construction of reality, identities and interests, the role of norms, and agency and structure.
2. How does Constructivism impact Realism and Liberalism?
3. What are the essential features of Marxism? Be sure to discuss the key actors and capitalist dynamics, material conditions and dependency theory, imperialism, and class struggle.
4. How does Marxism impact Realism and Liberalism?
5. Discuss Feminism's critique of traditional IR theory and its approaches to IR, the role of women in global politics, gendered violence, and Feminism's broader impact on international relations.
6. How does Feminism impact Realism and Liberalism?

6: MODELS OF FOREIGN POLICY MAKING

Introduction

The Cuban Missile Crisis, occurring in October 1962, was a 13-day confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union over the placement of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba. It is considered one of the most critical moments of the Cold War, with the world on the brink of nuclear war. The crisis began when U.S. spy planes discovered the missile sites in Cuba. In response, President John F. Kennedy imposed a naval blockade around Cuba, demanding the removal of the missiles. After intense negotiations, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the missiles in exchange for the U.S. promise not to invade Cuba and the removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey.

Graham Allison's book, *The Essence of Decision* (1971) sought to understand how decisions are made in a moment of crisis. Allison challenges the traditional notion of the rational model that had been the dominant theory in foreign policy decision-making. To illustrate his point, Allison used the example of the Cuban Missile Crisis and three models of interpretation to answer the following questions:

1. Why did the USSR place nuclear missiles in Cuba?
2. Why did the United States impose a blockade on Cuba in response?
3. Why did the USSR withdraw its missiles from Cuba?

Learning Objectives

- Describe the major decision-making theories in IR including the Rational Actor Model, the Organizational Process Model, and the Bureaucratic Politics Model.
- Assess the critique of the Rational Actor Model.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each decision-making model.

6.1: Rational Actor Model

6.2: Organizational Process Model

6.3: Bureaucratic Politics Model

6.4: Implications of the Essence of Decision

6.5: Criticisms of the Essence of Decision

6.6: Conclusion

6.7: Deeper Dive- International Organizations

6.8: Glossary

6.9: Additional Readings

6.10: Discussion Questions

6.1: Rational Actor Model

The Rational Actor Model

The Rational Actor Model (RAM) is the most conventional approach to understanding state actions. It assumes that states act as unified, rational entities in the international arena. According to this model, governments carefully evaluate their options and choose the one that maximizes national interest. According to RAM, the Soviet Union's decision to place nuclear missiles in Cuba is viewed as a rational attempt to level the playing field with the U.S., which had a significant advantage in nuclear missile capabilities. The USSR also aimed to deter the U.S. from launching an attack on Cuba, particularly after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. The U.S. government, led by Kennedy, had several options: doing nothing, engaging in diplomatic negotiations, conducting airstrikes or a ground invasion, or imposing a blockade. They chose the blockade because it was seen as a middle ground between inaction and military escalation. While RAM presents states as calculating and logical actors, it has been criticized for oversimplifying the complexity of decision-making, especially in crisis situations. In the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the assumption that the U.S. and the USSR acted purely rationally overlooks the internal and external pressures on leaders.

6.2: Organizational Process Model

The Organizational Process Model

The Organizational Process Model (OPM) focuses on the role of bureaucracies and their procedures in shaping state decisions. Instead of viewing the state as a unified actor, this model emphasizes that decisions are the result of routines, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and the established processes of organizations. According to OPM, the USSR's failure to conceal the construction of missile sites in Cuba can be attributed to the use of standard procedures used back in Russia. Bureaucracies rely on established processes, which may not always be adapted to changing circumstances. Similarly, the U.S. government did not resort to airstrikes or a ground invasion largely because these actions did not fit into the existing operational plans and procedures. President Kennedy was also concerned about civilian casualties and the inability to guarantee the destruction of all missiles through military action. The OPM model suggests that decisions during crises are often constrained by organizational routines. Rather than evaluating all possible alternatives, policymakers choose options that reduce uncertainty and rely on established procedures, even if these are not necessarily the most effective.

6.3: Bureaucratic Politics Model

The Bureaucratic Politics Model

The Bureaucratic Politics Model (BPM) posits that decisions are the result of bargaining, negotiation, and compromise among various government officials and agencies. According to this model, policies are not the product of a single, rational actor but are shaped by individuals with differing interests and goals. According to BPM, Khrushchev faced internal pressure due to the missile gap and the poor state of the Soviet economy. Cuba presented an inexpensive way to address both military and political issues. The decision to withdraw the missiles was a result of internal Soviet negotiations and external pressures. Kennedy faced significant political pressure from Republicans to take a tougher stance on Cuba, especially after the humiliation of the Bay of Pigs invasion. The choice of a blockade over more aggressive military action was seen as a balanced approach that would not escalate the crisis while still asserting U.S. power. This model highlights the role of internal political dynamics in shaping foreign policy. Decisions are often "ugly hybrids," influenced by personal preferences, organizational interests, and political bargaining.

6.4: Implications of the Essence of Decision

Limits of the RAM and MAD

When *The Essence of Decision* was first published, Allison challenged the dominant rational actor models in political science and international relations. He demonstrated that state behavior during crises like the Cuban Missile Crisis could not be fully explained by assuming rationality. By introducing the Organizational Process and Bureaucratic Politics models, Allison provided alternative explanations for how decisions are made in practice. The book also showed the fragility of mutually assured destruction (MAD) as a deterrent to nuclear war, emphasizing that organizational inefficiencies and political bargaining could lead to catastrophic outcomes despite rational calculations.

Above all, Allison described using rational actor models as dangerous. By using such models (and modes of thinking), people made unreliable assumptions about reality, which could have disastrous consequences. Part of what allowed the attack on Pearl Harbor to be pulled off was the assumption that, since Japan would lose such a war, they would never dare attack. The assumption under MAD is that nobody will ever start a nuclear war because of its consequences. However, humans do not act in a rational manner, which history has proven time and again.

6.5: Criticisms of the Essence of Decision

Critiques

A range of criticisms have been proffered against Allison's *Essence of Decision*. Critics argue that the Rational Actor, Organizational Process, and Bureaucratic Politics models oversimplify complex situations. Real-world decisions often involve a mix of all three models, and these categories may not always be mutually exclusive. Milton Friedman contended that, even if rational-expectation theories do not describe reality per se, they should be retained since they provide accurate predictions. Allison replied that Friedman had not provided enough evidence to demonstrate his theories actually predicted anything and criticized his arguments as unscientific. Allison was strongly criticized for using his added theories to make his own assumptions. One of the most cited: according to his political model, he postulated that Kennedy must have made an "under the table" agreement concerning the Turkish missiles, probably using his brother as a liaison. However, when tapes of EXCOM's proceedings were released in the 1990s, it turned out that Allison was entirely correct, which both silenced these critics and added to the book's stature. Some critics have noted that the models do not sufficiently address the role of ideological and psychological factors in decision-making, such as leaders' perceptions, biases, or nationalistic fervor.

6.6: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

It is important to consider every level of analysis as well as the various actors and organizations that shape the range of choices available to decision-makers. What follows is an in-depth look at the role of international organizations in shaping the scope and terrain of decision-making for states and their leaders.

6.7: Deeper Dive- International Organizations

Abidin's "International Organizations"

As you may have picked up in the previous chapter, we live in a world of laws. While sovereign states are the principal legal actors, international organisations are increasingly important in helping us govern our world. Today's international system is made up of a cacophony of different voices and interests. In addition to states there are also non-governmental organisations, multinational corporations and hybrid organisations which are a mix of all the different categories.

Imagine stepping off a plane into a foreign country. As you disembark you switch on your phone to check the messages that may have come through while you were in transit. You follow the sign that directs you to the airport's exit, clear immigration, and then pick up your luggage at the designated carousel. You then head straight for the 'nothing to declare' green lane to exit the airport. Those routine actions would have already brought you into contact with the work of at least four different international organisations. The aircraft that you arrived in would have been one of the many planes under the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and regulated by standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO); that you were able to use your phone to check messages would have been courtesy of the work of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU); and your customs clearance would have been facilitated by the Kyoto Convention set by the World Customs Organization (WCO) to simplify the customs process.

These are just some of the ways in which international organisations form an integral part of our everyday lives. Whether these organisations are working to build houses for the impoverished like UN-Habitat does, or working to ensure a standard of health for everyone like the World Health Organization (WHO) does, there is no running away from international organisations. Today, it is increasingly difficult to imagine an international system in which the only voices that matter are those of states.

International governmental organisations

An international governmental organisation (IGO), also referred to as an intergovernmental organisation, is an organisation with a membership of only states. The organisation is usually founded upon a treaty, or a multilateral agreement, and consists of more than two states. Member states determine the way in which the organisation is run, vote within the organisation and provide its funding.

Established in 1945 following the end of the Second World War, the United Nations (UN) is a prime example of an international governmental organisation with almost universal membership. Only states can be members of the United Nations and membership is valued because it confers upon the member state international recognition of its sovereignty. As of 2017 there are 193 UN member states – but it is important to note that a small number of states are not members. Taiwan, for example, has repeatedly requested membership but has had its request blocked by China. This is because China regards Taiwan as a part of its sovereign territory and does not recognise it as an independent nation. Taiwan, of course, wants United Nations membership because this will mean that the international community fully accepts its sovereignty. The Taiwan example has gone unresolved for decades due to the major role that China plays within the United Nations as one of its most powerful members.

There are six main organs of the United Nations. Once a state is a member, it is automatically a member of the General Assembly. This is the most democratic organ where each state gets one vote, no matter how big or small, rich or poor the country. It is also the place where, every September, world leaders give their address to the international community from behind a dark green podium with the UN crest clearly visible. The other organs are the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Trusteeship Council, the Secretariat and the International Court of Justice. By far the most powerful organ is the Security Council, which has 15 members. Five states – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – are permanent members of the Security Council. The other ten are voted in by the General Assembly for two-year tenures. The Security Council is the only organ that can impose sanctions on states or deploy military forces on behalf of the international community to keep the peace in a certain area, region or country. The United Nations itself does not have its own military force, but it can muster military and police personnel through contributions by its members. These UN peacekeepers are distinguished by their trademark blue helmets, giving rise to the nickname 'Blue Berets'.

In order to be inclusive the United Nations has welcomed the participation (note participation, not membership) of civil society groups during some of its meetings, but never at the sessions of the all-important Security Council. Organisations may speak

as observers to the General Assembly, or as organisations with ‘consultative status’ with the UN Economic and Social Council for example. There are civil society organisations on all issues, ranging from disarmament to oceanic noise pollution, and from mental health to refugees. There are also private individuals who are invited to speak at special United Nations meetings. It is therefore common to witness heart wrenching first-hand accounts of sexual abuses, torture, or discrimination. Such testimonies have the power to galvanise the international community. Yet, no matter how powerful these testimonies are, it is ultimately up to the member states to determine the course of action. The Secretariat, including the Secretary-General who leads the United Nations, cannot take action on its own and can only appeal to member states to ‘do something’. Because of this, the United Nations remains undeniably and irrevocably an international governmental organisation and not a level of authority above the states.

Here, the other designation sometimes used to describe IGOs – ‘intergovernmental organisation’ – is helpful in appreciating the difference in ‘global governance’ (which IGOs bring to our international system) and ‘global government’ (which does not currently exist). Virtually all IGOs are intergovernmental. This means that their power rests with governments (the member states) not with the organisation. States are free to leave the organisations, or even in some cases to ignore them. There are usually consequences for both actions, but the fact remains that even in extreme cases – when an organisation like the United Nations imposes sanctions, or authorises war, on a state – international governmental organisations do not rule over states. Such punitive measures are only possible when the members of the UN Security Council are in accord, agree with such proposals, and a coalition of states agrees to finance and partake in the operation. Therefore, the power rests with the states themselves, especially the more powerful states, and there are regular examples of states rejecting a certain course of action because it was not in their national interest. Here, the failures of the United Nations to establish a coordinated response to the Syrian war comes to mind, despite hundreds of thousands killed and millions displaced since 2011.

If an IGO was not intergovernmental, as explained above, it would be in the rare category of ‘supranational’. To have supranational powers means that an organisation is actually able to govern its members and have a degree of independence from its member states. The only clear example of a major organisation such as this is the European Union (EU). For that reason, it is often described as *sui generis*, or ‘unique’ in its own right. The European Union is unique because, unlike the United Nations and other international governmental organisations, it can actually be said to exercise a degree of sovereignty over its members via law-making powers in certain areas that its members agreed to relocate to the supranational level. It also has its own currency which, together with other capabilities, gives it some of the powers otherwise only seen in states. This is not without controversy in Europe and there is a rising tide of discontent with the growing power of the European Union and a desire in some political circles to weaken, or even dissolve, the organisation so that more of the power returns to the states. The ‘Brexit’ debate, when the British public voted in a 2016 referendum to leave the European Union, raised many of these issues and is an interesting instance of the idea of supranationalism being challenged.

Leaving aside bigger organisations like the European Union and the United Nations, international governmental organisations are typically more specific in nature – often dealing with just one particular issue or a specific geographical area. The work that they do is often clear from their names – for example, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) or the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL). These are issue-based organisations and their members are worldwide. Then there are organisations of states in specific regions, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the African Union (AU). These often emulate elements of the European Union, but none (as yet) feature supranational powers. Other organisations are neither geographically limited nor limited to a single issue. The Commonwealth of Nations, for example, is an organisation whose membership is restricted to former colonies of the United Kingdom. Having been around since 1949, the Commonwealth also has its own permanent secretariat. An international governmental organisation that does not have its own fixed secretariat is the BRICS – an intergovernmental organisation of only five countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) focusing on economic and financial issues of interest to its members. The point to remember is that as long as an organisation is composed exclusively of states, or governments (including government agencies), it is an international governmental organisation operating according to international norms.

These international governmental organisations are outside the United Nations but are almost always tied to the UN in some way or another. For some, these ties are explicitly spelled out in the document that establishes them. For others, the simple goal of ensuring that their work is relevant ties them to the United Nations at least tangentially. Take the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), for example. The founding statute of the Agency dictates that its reports should go to the United Nations so that the Security Council may take action against any countries that fail to meet their obligations. This works out well for the international community – as the International Atomic Energy Agency monitors the use of nuclear technology while the UN Security Council enforces measures to ensure state compliance over nuclear safety and security.

International non-governmental organisations and hybrid international organisations

International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) are non-governmental organisations that either work at the international level or have international members. International non-governmental organisations are a mixed bag, best described as those organisations that are not intergovernmental, business entities or terrorist organisations (Davies 2014, 3). There is no exact figure for the number of international non-governmental organisations that are currently active. The United Nations lists over 4,000 with consultative status – which may only be a fraction of their true number.

Some spectacular and headline-grabbing protests are organised by certain international non-governmental organisations. Images of Greenpeace protestors chaining themselves to ships, or of anti-globalisation protestors blocking streets, are usually well covered in the media. These are the organisations whose mission is to raise awareness among the general public on issues of concern. No less effective are those that carry out their missions away from the limelight. Mercy Corps, for example, helps disaster survivors in countries around the globe, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) is often the first highly skilled responder to a crisis and Oxfam is at the forefront of various poverty eradication programmes around the world. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan termed groups like these the ‘unsung heroes’ of the international community.

Hybrid organisations are those international organisations whose membership comprises both states and civil society members. The states may be represented by government departments or agencies; while civil society, as we have seen earlier, can be just about anyone or any organisation. One such hybrid international organisation is the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which deals primarily with the preservation of the environment and whose members include government agencies from countries such as Fiji and Spain and non-governmental organisations from all corners of the globe. Individual members are often experts and affiliated to one of the IUCN’s six commissions. The number of hybrid organisations has increased as more and more partnerships are forged between states and civil society. There is now an understanding that hybrid organisations, where governments, non-governmental organisations and multinational corporations all have a say, can be highly effective because of the reach, expertise and funding that such groupings can command.

How international organisations shape our world

One of the more visible international non-governmental organisations in the world is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Today, the Red Cross is synonymous with work with victims of humanitarian crises, but before its founding there was no organisation to carry out such work and no guidelines for humanitarian concerns arising out of war and conflict. In 1862, Swiss businessman Henry Dunant published a book describing the aftermath of the 1859 Battle of Solferino, which he had experienced first-hand. He wrote how the soldiers were left wounded on the field with no medical care even after the battle had ended. Dunant managed to organise the local population into providing assistance to the sick and wounded. Many were moved by his account and in 1863 Dunant founded the International Committee of the Red Cross. Dunant’s efforts prompted a push to provide for the care of wounded soldiers and civilians caught in places of conflict. This was the start of the Geneva Conventions, which all UN members have since ratified. The Geneva Conventions form part of the international law that governs humanitarian concerns arising out of war and conflict and stand as testimony of how an international non-governmental organisation (in this case the Red Cross) can start a movement that later develops into international norms and standards.

States were once the judge, jury and executioner of all matters related to the conduct of international affairs. Under the guise of state sovereignty, the state could act with impunity as far as its citizens and lands were concerned. Those days are effectively over as the pressure of outside interests, amplified through international non-governmental organisations, have eroded state impunity. In no other area has there been such a major leap forward than in the development of norms involving international human rights. It also used to be the case that monarchs, presidents, prime ministers and other state leaders held immunity from any kind of criminal prosecution while they were in power. That too, has now changed. The International Criminal Court, which sits in The Hague, now has the jurisdiction to hold individuals responsible for a range of crimes. The United Nations briefly discussed the idea of an international criminal court in the 1950s, but it took the efforts of a coalition of international non-governmental organisations, calling themselves the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, to realise the vision of a world court for heinous crimes. In 1997, the Coalition eventually managed to garner the political will, and within a few short years the Court had been established. Today, approximately two thirds of the world’s states are members and dozens of individuals have been prosecuted for war crimes, genocide and other crimes against humanity.

There are many success stories of how international organisations, once thought to be the tools of states, have come into their own and set the agenda for the international community. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of environmental preservation. It took the combined efforts of vocal non-governmental organisations and might of the United Nations to bring

states together for a watershed conference on the environment in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Often called the Earth Summit, the UN Conference on Environment and Development was revolutionary because it emphasised the collective responsibility of states towards the wellbeing of the earth. Due to the Earth Summit, states signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Convention to Combat Desertification – treaties that became important milestones in the fight to save the environment from the harmful practices of mankind. The momentum the Earth Summit generated still has an impact today as nations continue to work together, albeit often acrimoniously, to combat climate change.

For the average citizen, the most important international organisations might be those whose work can be felt on the ground. The UN Development Programme has been a lifeline for many impoverished nations, helping to raise populations out of absolute poverty, developing programmes to allow the people to be economically sustainable and closing the gender equality gap that exists in many developing nations. In these cases, instead of states contributing to the organisation and keeping it financially afloat, it is sometimes international governmental organisations such as the World Bank that provide the means for the states to pursue development policies that would otherwise not be possible. However, the results of these assistance programmes have been mixed and they are often contentious, as they have sometimes left countries in significant debt or failed to improve their economies.

Conclusion

Like most other things, international organisations are only as good as the results they yield, but there is no denying that they play a central role in international affairs. Their growth, particularly in the twentieth century when the concept of global governance came of age, means that nearly every aspect of life is regulated in some way at the global level. International organisations, in their vast array of forms, complement and sometimes positively challenge the role of the state. Going back to the airport analogy used at the start of this chapter, we may not always be aware of how international organisations affect even the most mundane things in our lives. But, our lives would be materially different without them.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe what Abidin means when she writes: “...we live in a world of laws. While sovereign states are the principal legal actors, international organizations are increasingly important in helping us govern our world.”
2. What are the defining characteristics of an international governmental organization (or intergovernmental organization, IGO)?
3. Outline the history and makeup of the United Nations.
4. Distinguish between “global governance” and “global government.”
5. What does it mean to say the EU is a supranational IGO?
6. Name and describe an issue-specific and a regional IGO.
7. What are international non-governmental organizations (INGOs)? Provide an example.
8. Evaluate the claim: “...the pressure of outside interests, amplified through international non-governmental organizations, have eroded state impunity. In no other area has there been such a major leap forward than in the development of norms involving international human rights?”
9. What does Abidin mean when she writes, “...nearly every aspect of life is regulated in some way at the global level. International organizations, in their vast array of forms, complement and sometimes positively challenge the role of the state.”

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Key Terms and Definitions

- **Bay of Pigs Invasion:** A failed military invasion of Cuba undertaken by Cuban exiles sponsored by the U.S. government in April 1961, aimed at overthrowing Fidel Castro's regime.
- **Cuban Missile Crisis:** A 13-day confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in October 1962, triggered by the discovery of Soviet ballistic missiles in Cuba. The crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.
- **Graham Allison:** An American political scientist and author, best known for his work on decision-making in international relations. His 1971 book *The Essence of Decision* analyzed the Cuban Missile Crisis using three distinct models of decision-making.
- **Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD):** A doctrine of military strategy in which the use of nuclear weapons by two or more opposing sides would result in the complete annihilation of both the attacker and the defender, serving as a deterrent to nuclear war.
- **Naval Blockade:** A military strategy used to prevent ships from entering or leaving enemy ports. In the Cuban Missile Crisis, the U.S. imposed a naval blockade around Cuba to stop the delivery of Soviet nuclear missiles.
- **The Bureaucratic Politics Model (BPM):** A model viewing foreign policy decisions as the result of bargaining and compromise among government officials.
- **The Essence of Decision:** A 1971 book by Graham Allison that analyzes decision-making during the Cuban Missile Crisis, using three distinct models.
- **The Organizational Process Model (OPM):** A model explaining foreign policy decisions as outcomes of established procedures and routines within bureaucracies, rather than deliberate rational choices.
- **The Rational Actor Model (RAM):** A model that assumes states act as unitary, rational actors, evaluating options and selecting the one that maximizes national interests.
- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):** Established routines used by bureaucracies to handle tasks, which can constrain decision-making, especially during crises.

6.9: Additional Readings

Scholarly Resources

Allison, Graham. 1969. "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *American Political Science Review*, Vol 63, No. 3: 689-718.

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6.10: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 6

1. What is the Rational Actor Model (RAM) of decision-making?
2. Compare and contrast the RAM with the Organizational Process Model (OPM) and the Bureaucratic Politics Model (BPM) of decision-making.
3. What are the implications of Allison's *Essence of Decision*?
4. Describe the various critiques of Allison's work.

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7: LEADERS AND DECISION MAKING

Introduction

Foreign policy decision-making is the process through which states and their leaders determine how to interact with the international community. It encompasses decisions ranging from peace negotiations and alliances to declarations of war or trade sanctions. The complexity of decision-making arises from the variety of factors that influence decisions, including individual psychology, group dynamics, bureaucratic structures, and the international environment.

Learning Objectives

- Assess the impact of individual psychology, group dynamics, bureaucratic structures, and the international environment on foreign policy decision-making.
- Describe types of decisions, psychological influences and biases, and organizational and group dynamics impacting foreign policy decision-making.

[7.1: Levels of Analysis in Foreign Policy Decision-Making](#)

[7.2: Types of Decisions](#)

[7.3: Psychological Influences and Biases](#)

[7.4: Organizational and Group Dynamics](#)

[7.5: Crisis Decision-Making](#)

[7.6: Conclusion](#)

[7.7: Glossary](#)

[7.8: Additional Readings](#)

[7.9: Discussion Questions](#)

7.1: Levels of Analysis in Foreign Policy Decision-Making

Levels of Analysis

Decision-making in foreign policy can be studied at three primary levels: individual, group, and coalition. Each level highlights different aspects of how decisions are made and the dynamics at play in different contexts. At the individual level, foreign policy decisions are influenced by the beliefs, personality traits, and psychological biases of individual leaders. Some leaders have outsized influence on foreign policy due to their personal authority or expertise. For example, strong leaders like Vladimir Putin or Franklin D. Roosevelt shaped their countries' foreign policies through their distinct leadership styles. Many foreign policy decisions are made by advisory groups or within bureaucratic institutions. Group dynamics can play a significant role in shaping outcomes. For example, “groupthink” can lead to poor decisions when the desire for consensus overrides critical evaluation. In contrast, group diversity can help in generating better options through open debate. In coalition governments, foreign policy decisions result from the negotiation of multiple political parties, each representing different interests. Coalition dynamics can complicate decision-making as parties must compromise to reach a consensus, often leading to slower or more conservative policies.

7.2: Types of Decisions

Decision Types

Foreign policy decisions vary depending on the context, the actors involved, and the pressures faced by decision-makers. Understanding the different types of decisions can help explain how strategies evolve in the international arena. Single or one-shot decisions are isolated decisions with no expectation of immediate follow-up. An example is Libya's decision in 2003 to abandon its nuclear program, which was a standalone foreign policy shift not directly tied to sequential moves. Interactive decisions involve reciprocal interactions between multiple actors. Decisions made by one country may trigger a response from another. For instance, the U.S.-Soviet arms race during the Cold War involved a series of interactive decisions, where each side's actions influenced the other's next move. Sequential decisions are made in a sequence, with each step dependent on the outcome of the previous one. Sequential decision-making is common in negotiations and long-term strategic planning, such as the series of steps taken in the lead-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

7.3: Psychological Influences and Biases

Introduction to Psychological Influences and Biases

In addition to the last chapter's models; The Rational Actor Model, The Organizational Process Model, and The Bureaucratic Politics Model, psychologists also look at the individual cognitive levels of leaders to explain their decisions. Psychological models emphasize the role of individual cognition, including biases and decision-making heuristics, in shaping foreign policy. Leaders often rely on mental shortcuts to process information quickly, but this can lead to errors in judgment, such as overestimating the likelihood of success in risky ventures. Leaders and groups are subject to cognitive biases that can distort their perception of international events and lead to flawed decisions.

Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon where the desire for group cohesion and consensus leads to poor decision-making. In these cases, dissenting opinions are often suppressed, leading to an incomplete evaluation of options. The Bay of Pigs invasion is a classic example of groupthink, where the Kennedy administration's desire for unanimity led to a failed military operation. Attribution of bias occurs when leaders attribute their own actions to situational factors (e.g., "we had no choice") while attributing the actions of others to their character or intent (e.g., "they are aggressive"). This can lead to misinterpretations of other states' motives and escalate tensions unnecessarily. Prospect theory suggests that leaders are more risk-averse when dealing with potential gains but more willing to take risks when facing potential losses. For instance, a leader may be more likely to engage in military conflict to recover lost territory than to gain new territory.

7.4: Organizational and Group Dynamics

Introduction to Organizational and Group Dynamics

Groups and organizations play a central role in foreign policy decision-making. The structure and dynamics of these groups can significantly influence the decisions that are made. Bureaucratic politics refers to decision-making within governments that involves negotiation between competing interests. Different agencies may have conflicting priorities, such as a defense ministry advocating for military action while a foreign affairs ministry pushes for diplomacy. These internal battles can shape the final policy outcome. Leaders often rely on a close group of advisors to help make foreign policy decisions. However, the dynamics within these groups, such as deference to authority or the suppression of dissent, can skew the decision-making process, as seen during the decision to escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In coalition governments, the need to balance the interests of different political parties can lead to compromises in foreign policy. Coalition dynamics often result in slower decision-making and policies that reflect a compromise between competing agendas.

7.5: Crisis Decision-Making

Introduction to Crisis Decision-Making

In times of crisis, foreign policy decision-making becomes more centralized and urgent. Leaders must act quickly, often with incomplete information and high stakes. Several factors characterize crisis decision-making, including time constraints, information constraints, and high stakes. Crises often require rapid decisions, forcing leaders to rely on simplified decision-making processes and cognitive shortcuts. Decision-makers frequently operate with incomplete or inaccurate information, complicating their ability to make rational decisions. The potential consequences of crisis decisions are often severe, involving matters of national security, war, or economic collapse. The higher the stakes, the more likely leaders are to take extreme actions.

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7.6: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

Foreign policy decision-making is a complex process influenced by various factors, from individual psychology to bureaucratic politics and coalition dynamics. Decision-makers must navigate a range of constraints, including time pressures, information gaps, and group dynamics. Understanding these factors provides valuable insights into why states act the way they do on the international stage. Whether during moments of crisis or in long-term strategic planning, foreign policy decisions reflect a combination of rational calculations, psychological biases, and organizational influences.

Key Terms and Definitions

- **Attribution Bias:** The tendency of decision-makers to attribute their own actions to situational factors while attributing the actions of others to their character or intent, often leading to misinterpretations of motivations.
- **Bureaucratic Politics:** A model of decision-making where different governmental agencies and departments, each with their own interests and objectives, compete for influence, resulting in decisions shaped by internal bargaining rather than a unified national strategy.
- **Coalition:** A temporary alliance of political parties or groups formed to achieve a common goal, often seen in parliamentary systems where multiple parties must work together to form a government or make policy decisions.
- **Coalition Level:** The level of decision-making that involves negotiation and compromise among different political parties or groups within a coalition government, often leading to slower or more complex decision processes.
- **Crisis Decision-Making:** A decision-making process in situations where leaders must act quickly under time pressure, often with incomplete information and facing high-stakes outcomes. Crisis decisions can involve national security, economic crises, or natural disasters.
- **Group Level:** The level of decision-making that occurs within groups, such as advisory councils, cabinets, or bureaucratic organizations. Group dynamics, including consensus-building and internal negotiations, shape the outcome.
- **Groupthink:** A psychological phenomenon in which the desire for group cohesion and consensus leads to poor decision-making. Dissenting opinions are suppressed, and the group may fail to critically evaluate alternative options, resulting in suboptimal outcomes.
- **Interactive Decisions:** Foreign policy decisions that involve reciprocal interactions between multiple actors, where the actions of one state influence the decisions of another. For example, an arms race involves interactive decisions as each state reacts to the other's moves.
- **Prospect Theory:** A theory of decision-making that suggests individuals are risk-averse when facing potential gains but are more willing to take risks when faced with potential losses. Leaders may pursue aggressive strategies to recover perceived losses.
- **Sequential Decisions:** Decisions made as part of a process where each choice is dependent on the outcome of a previous decision, often seen in negotiations or long-term foreign policy strategies.
- **Single-Shot Decisions:** Isolated, standalone decisions that are made without immediate expectation of follow-up. These decisions are rare in foreign policy but can include one-time strategic shifts, such as abandoning a weapons program.

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7.9: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 7

1. Describe the levels of analysis in foreign policy decision-making, including individual, group, and coalition levels.
2. Compare and contrast single or one-shot, interactive, and sequential decisions.
3. Describe and explain the importance of groupthink, attribution bias, and prospect theory.
4. How do bureaucratic politics, advisory groups, and coalitions impact foreign policy decision-making?
5. Explain how time constraints, information constraints, and high stakes impact crisis decision-making.

8: WAR

Introduction

War is a central topic in International Relations (IR), profoundly shaping global power dynamics, state behavior, and the development of international norms. It is often seen as a tool used by states or non-state actors to achieve political objectives when diplomacy and other methods fail. This chapter explores the nature of war, its causes, theoretical frameworks like Realism and Just War Theory, and how technology, securitization, and terrorism influence modern warfare.

Learning Objectives

- Define war, actors involved in war, and types of wars.
- Assess Realism's interpretation of war and its causes.
- Discuss political, economic, and social/cultural causes of war.
- Describe Just War Theory and the impact of technological developments on war.
- Evaluate the impact of Securitization, terrorism, and efforts to regulate war.

8.1: Defining War

8.2: Realism in International Relations

8.3: Causes of War

8.4: Just War Theory

8.5: Escalation and Total War

8.6: Technological Influence

8.7: Securitization and Political Use of War

8.8: Control of War

8.9: Global Terrorism

8.10: Conclusion

8.11: Deeper Dive- Diplomacy

8.12: Glossary

8.13: Additional Readings

8.14: Discussion Questions

8.1: Defining War

War Defined

War is commonly defined as organized violence between two or more political entities—usually states or significant groups—leading to a high level of destruction and casualties. It is typically prolonged and involves strategic objectives. Carl von Clausewitz, a foundational theorist of war, described it as "the continuation of politics by other means." This reflects the political nature of war, as states use violence to achieve political goals when non-violent means fail. For example, in World War II, Germany's invasion of Poland was a political move driven by territorial ambitions. Traditionally, wars were fought between states, but modern warfare often involves non-state actors such as insurgent groups, terrorist organizations, or mercenaries. The conflict in Syria, involving the state, rebel factions, and external actors like the U.S. and Russia, exemplifies this shift. Wars can be categorized into conventional wars, where organized militaries fight, and unconventional wars, such as guerrilla or insurgent warfare, which often involve irregular forces using tactics like ambushes and sabotage.

8.2: Realism in International Relations

War and Realism

Realism is a dominant theory in IR that views war as an inevitable feature of the international system, driven by the anarchic nature of global politics, where no central authority exists to enforce rules. Realists argue that the lack of a central governing body at the international level forces states to rely on their own capabilities for security. This leads to competition, distrust, and sometimes war. The Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union is a prime example of how an anarchic system fosters conflict, as both superpowers sought to outmaneuver each other in a bid for global dominance. The security dilemma is a key concept in realism, where one state's efforts to enhance its security (such as building up its military) are seen as a threat by others, prompting an arms race. This was evident during the Cuban Missile Crisis, where U.S. security measures led the Soviet Union to deploy missiles in Cuba, escalating tensions. Realism holds that states are primarily motivated by the desire to maintain or increase their power to ensure survival. War becomes a tool for this when diplomacy fails. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 can be viewed through a realist lens as an attempt to secure American interests in the Middle East by eliminating a potential threat.

8.3: Causes of War

Introduction to the Causes of War

Wars are caused by a complex array of factors, including political, economic, and social elements. Understanding these causes helps explain why conflicts arise and how they can escalate. Wars often occur due to territorial disputes, power struggles, or ideological conflicts. For instance, the Falklands War in 1982 between Argentina and the United Kingdom stemmed from a territorial dispute over the Falkland Islands. Argentina's claim to the islands and its desire to assert sovereignty clashed with British interests, leading to war. Competition over resources, such as oil, minerals, or trade routes, frequently drives states into conflict. The Gulf War of 1990-1991, where Iraq invaded Kuwait, was driven largely by Iraq's desire to control Kuwait's vast oil reserves and reduce its own debt burden. Ethnic and religious tensions often lead to violence. The Rwandan Genocide in 1994, though primarily an ethnic conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi groups, illustrates how deep social divisions can explode into large-scale violence.

8.4: Just War Theory

Introduction to Just War Theory

Just War Theory offers a moral framework for evaluating whether going to war and the way war is conducted are justifiable. It is divided into two primary components: *jus ad bellum* (justice in going to war) and *jus in bello* (justice in conduct during war). *Jus ad bellum* outlines the conditions under which war can be justly initiated. Key criteria include having a just cause (e.g., self-defense), legitimate authority (e.g., war declared by a government), and war being a last resort after other options have been exhausted. The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks was justified under *jus ad bellum* as a form of self-defense against terrorism. *Jus in bello* governs how war is conducted, emphasizing proportionality (the use of force must be appropriate to the military objective) and discrimination (combatants must distinguish between military targets and civilians). Violations of these principles, such as indiscriminate bombings or targeting civilians, are considered war crimes. In modern conflicts, adhering to Just War principles is particularly difficult in asymmetric warfare, where one side employs tactics like terrorism. The use of drone strikes by the U.S. in Pakistan and Afghanistan has been controversial due to concerns over civilian casualties.

8.5: Escalation and Total War

Introduction to Escalation and Total War

The nature of warfare has changed dramatically over time, with conflicts escalating from limited engagements to total wars that involve entire societies. Wars often start as limited conflicts but escalate as more actors become involved or as stakes increase. For example, World War I began as a localized conflict but escalated due to alliances, drawing in major powers and resulting in unprecedented destruction. Total war refers to conflicts in which countries mobilize all available resources—economic, industrial, and human—to achieve victory, with little distinction between military and civilian targets. World War II was a classic example of total war, as nations like Germany, Japan, and the Allied powers devoted their entire economies and populations to the war effort. While total war is less common today, conflicts can still escalate dramatically. The Syrian Civil War began as a domestic uprising but quickly became a complex proxy war involving multiple international actors, including the U.S., Russia, Turkey, and Iran, each with competing interests.

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8.6: Technological Influence

Technological Advancements

Technological advancements have profoundly influenced the conduct of war, making it more destructive and precise, while raising new ethical and strategic dilemmas. Drone technology has revolutionized warfare by allowing states to conduct targeted strikes without risking the lives of their soldiers. The U.S. has extensively used drones in the Middle East and Africa to target terrorist leaders. While drones offer precision, they have also sparked ethical debates due to the unintended killing of civilians and the psychological toll on communities living under constant surveillance. Technology has introduced new forms of conflict, including cyber warfare, where states or non-state actors use hacking to disrupt the operations of their enemies. Cyberattacks have been used to disable critical infrastructure, as seen in the 2007 cyberattack on Estonia, widely attributed to Russian actors. The development of nuclear weapons fundamentally altered the nature of war by introducing the possibility of mass destruction. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II remain the only instances of nuclear weapons being used in conflict, but the existence of these weapons continues to influence global politics through deterrence strategies.

8.7: Securitization and Political Use of War

Securitization and Politics

Securitization theory explores how political actors frame certain issues as existential threats, which then justifies extraordinary measures, including war. After the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government securitized the issue of global terrorism, framing it as an urgent, existential threat that required immediate and decisive action. This securitization led to the invasion of Afghanistan and later Iraq, framing these conflicts as essential for protecting national security. By framing certain issues as existential threats, governments can bypass normal political processes and justify extreme actions. During the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union both securitized the ideological conflict between capitalism and communism, leading to proxy wars around the globe, including the Vietnam War. The securitization of issues often results in long-term military engagements, expanded surveillance, and restrictions on civil liberties. For instance, the U.S. Patriot Act, passed after 9/11, expanded government surveillance powers, raising concerns about individual rights.

8.8: Control of War

Efforts to Limit Destruction

Efforts to limit the destructiveness of war have resulted in the development of international laws and institutions aimed at regulating how wars are fought and preventing atrocities. The Geneva Conventions and other international treaties seek to protect non-combatants and ensure humane treatment of prisoners. Violations of these laws, such as the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Civil War, have led to global condemnation and efforts at enforcement through the United Nations and the International Criminal Court. International organizations like the United Nations play a key role in controlling war by sending peacekeeping forces and mediating negotiations. The U.N. has deployed peacekeepers to conflict zones like the Democratic Republic of Congo to protect civilians and stabilize regions. Despite the existence of these laws, enforcement remains a significant challenge. Non-state actors, such as terrorist organizations, often ignore international norms, as seen in the tactics used by groups like ISIS, which include targeting civilians and using chemical weapons.

8.9: Global Terrorism

The Impact of Global Terrorism

Global terrorism has fundamentally changed the landscape of war by introducing non-state actors who use asymmetric tactics to achieve political goals. Unlike traditional state-based wars, terrorism involves smaller, less powerful groups using unconventional tactics, such as suicide bombings and hostage-taking, to destabilize more powerful states. Al-Qaeda's attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001, exemplified how non-state actors could use terrorism to draw powerful states into prolonged conflicts. The rise of global terrorist networks like ISIS and Al-Qaeda has reshaped international security. These groups operate across borders, necessitating multinational efforts to combat them. The U.S.-led coalition against ISIS, involving countries from Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, demonstrates how terrorism has created a new form of global conflict.

8.10: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

War is a deeply embedded feature of the international system, shaped by power politics, economic interests, social tensions, and technological advancements. Theories like realism provide a lens to understand why wars occur, while frameworks such as Just War Theory offer moral guidelines for how they should be conducted. Modern conflicts, involving both state and non-state actors, have evolved, challenging traditional understandings of warfare. Understanding the causes, conduct, and consequences of war is essential for anyone studying International Relations. Moreover, it is equally important to understand the role of diplomacy when it comes to war. Diplomacy is the means by which war is prevented and warfare is ended. What follows is an exploration of diplomacy with a focus on the United States and Iran.

8.11: Deeper Dive- Diplomacy

McGlinchey, "Diplomacy"

War compels and focuses public attention, leaves a clear mark on human life, and is responsible for shaping our world. On the other hand, despite its importance, diplomacy rarely gains much attention. When military theorist Carl von Clausewitz remarked in the early 1800s that war was the continuation of policy by other means, he sought to normalise the idea of war in modern politics. But, his words also indicated that actions short of war are available to help states achieve their objectives. These are typically the actions of diplomats. And, their work is often far less expensive, far more effective and much more predictable a strategy than war. In fact, unlike in centuries gone by when war was common, diplomacy is what we understand today as the normal state of affairs governing international relations. And, in the modern era, diplomacy is conducted not only between nation-states, but also by a range of non-state actors such as the European Union and the United Nations.

What is diplomacy?

Diplomacy has probably existed for as long as civilisation has. The easiest way to understand it is to start by seeing it as a system of structured communication between two or more parties. Records of regular contact via envoys travelling between neighbouring civilisations date back at least 2500 years. They lacked many of the characteristics and commonalities of modern diplomacy such as embassies, international law and professional diplomatic services. Yet, it should be underlined that political communities, however they may have been organised, have usually found ways to communicate during peacetime, and have established a wide range of practices for doing so. The benefits are clear when you consider that diplomacy can promote exchanges that enhance trade, culture, wealth and knowledge.

For those looking for a quick definition, diplomacy can be defined as a process between actors (diplomats, usually representing a state) who exist within a system (international relations) and engage in private and public dialogue (diplomacy) to pursue their objectives in a peaceful manner.

Diplomacy is not foreign policy and must be distinguished from it. It may be helpful to perceive diplomacy as part of foreign policy. When a nation-state makes foreign policy it does so for its own national interests. And, these interests are shaped by a wide range of factors. In basic terms, a state's foreign policy has two key ingredients; its actions and its strategies for achieving its goals. The interaction one state has with another is considered the act of its foreign policy. This act typically takes place via interactions between government personnel through diplomacy. To interact without diplomacy would typically limit a state's foreign policy actions to conflict (usually war, but also via economic sanctions) or espionage. In that sense, diplomacy is an essential tool required to operate successfully in today's international system.

In the modern context then, a system dominated by states, we can reasonably regard diplomacy as something being conducted for the most part between states. In fact, the applicable international law that governs diplomacy – the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) – only references states as diplomatic actors. Yet, the modern international system also involves powerful actors that are not states. These tend to be international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and international governmental organisations (IGOs). These actors regularly partake in areas of diplomacy and often materially shape outcomes. For example, the United Nations and the European Union (two IGOs) materially shaped diplomacy in the case studies highlighted later in this chapter. And, a range of INGOs – such as Greenpeace – have meaningfully advanced progress toward treaties and agreements in important areas tied to the health and progress of humankind such as international environmental negotiations.

While readers of this book will be familiar with the concept of war to some extent due to its ubiquity in modern life, diplomacy may present itself as something alien or distant. On the one hand this is a consequence of what diplomacy is and how it is carried out. Diplomacy is most often an act carried out by representatives of a state, or a non-state actor, usually behind closed doors. In these instances, diplomacy is a silent process working along in its routine (and often highly complex) form, carried out by rank-and-file diplomats and representatives. This is perhaps not the best place to shine a light on diplomacy for beginners. On the other hand, sometimes the public are presented with briefings, statements, or – more rarely – full disclosures of a diplomatic matter. These usually drift into the public consciousness when they involve critical international issues and draw in high-ranking officials. Because they do get headlines and work their way into the history books, examples drawn from this type of diplomacy are used in this chapter to offer a more palatable access point.

To enable the reader to get a sense of what diplomacy is and why it is important, this chapter will use two interrelated case studies. The first case study involves the quest to manage the spread of nuclear weapons. The second half of the twentieth century came to be dominated by conflict between two nuclear-armed superpowers, the United States of America (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) – often called the Soviet Union. In this tense climate, diplomacy ensured that few other nation-states developed nuclear weapons. Hence, the diplomatic success in curbing the proliferation of nuclear weapons is a major one, and one that involved non-state as well as nation-state actors. US-Iran relations form the second case study. This case spans several important decades from the end of the Second World War, to the present day. As times changed, the structure of international relations also changed, often causing material shifts in the patterns of diplomacy between both nations. By visiting that relationship, it is possible to not just show the importance of high-level diplomacy between two pivotal states but also to consider the importance of an international governmental organisation – the European Union. The case studies were chosen as they offer a glimpse of diplomacy between states that were sworn enemies and had had little in common due to incompatible economic, political, or even religious, systems. Yet, through diplomacy, they were able to avoid war and find ways to achieve progress in the most critical of areas.

Regulating nuclear weapons

After the first use of an atomic bomb by the US on Japan in August 1945, the world was transformed. Reports and pictures of the total devastation caused by the two bombs that the US dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima confirmed that the nature of warfare had changed forever. As one reporter described the scene: There is no way of comparing the Atom Bomb damage with anything we've ever seen before. Whereas bombs leave gutted buildings and framework standing, the Atom bomb leaves nothing (Hoffman 1945).

Although the US was the first state to successfully detonate a nuclear bomb, other nations were also researching the technology. The second state to successfully detonate a bomb was the Soviet Union (1949). The United Kingdom (1952), France (1960) and China (1964) followed. As the number of nations possessing nuclear weapons increased from one to five, there were genuine fears that these dangerous weapons would proliferate uncontrollably to many other nations.

Proliferation was not only a numbers issue. As the weapons developed in sophistication from those dropped in Japan they became many orders of magnitude more destructive, representing a grave threat to humankind as a whole. By the early 1960s, nuclear weapons had been built that could cause devastation for hundreds of kilometres beyond the impact zone. The United States and the Soviet Union, who were locked into a system of rivalry known as the Cold War, seemed to be in a race to outdo each other in terms of the quantity and quality of bombs each possessed. The Cold War was known as such because the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides made a traditional war between the two almost unfathomable. If somehow they were to end up engaged in a direct conflict they each had the power to destroy the other entirely and in doing so jeopardise human civilisation as a whole.

It may seem strange but, despite their offensive power, nuclear weapons are primarily held as defensive tools – unlikely to be ever used. This is due to a concept known as deterrence. By holding a weapon that can wipe out an opponent, such an opponent is unlikely to attack you. Especially if your weapons can survive that attack and allow you to retaliate. In an environment as insecure as the Cold War, gaining a nuclear arsenal was a way to achieve deterrence and a measure of security that was not otherwise attainable. This was obviously an attractive option for states. For this reason, any hope of creating an international regime of moderation over nuclear weapons seemed doomed during the Cold War.

To the brink and back

The United Nations (UN), which was created in 1945 in part to give international diplomacy a focal point and create a more secure world, attempted in vain to outlaw nuclear weapons in the late 1940s. Following that failure, a series of less absolute goals were advanced, most notably to regulate the testing of nuclear weapons. Weapons that were being developed required test detonations, and each test released large amounts of radiation into the atmosphere, endangering ecosystems and human health.

By the late 1950s, high-level diplomacy under a United Nations framework had managed to establish a moratorium (or suspension) on nuclear testing by the United States and the Soviet Union. However, by 1961 a climate of mistrust and heightened tensions between the two nations caused testing to resume. One year later, in 1962, the world came to the brink of nuclear war in what is now known as the Cuban Missile Crisis when the Soviet Union sought to place nuclear warheads in Cuba, a small island nation in the Caribbean less than 150 kilometres off the southern coast of the United States. Cuban leader Fidel Castro had requested the weapons to deter the United States from meddling in Cuban politics following a failed US-sponsored invasion by anti-Castro forces in 1961. As Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev (1962) put it, 'the two most powerful nations had been squared off against each other, each with its finger on the button.' After pushing each other to the brink, US president John F. Kennedy

and Khrushchev found that via diplomacy, they could agree to a compromise that satisfied the basic security needs of the other. Over a series of negotiations Soviet missiles were removed from Cuba in return for the United States removing missiles they had deployed in Turkey and Italy. As the two sides could not fully trust each other due to their rivalry, the diplomacy was based (and succeeded) on the principle of verification by the United Nations, which independently checked for compliance.

Once the immediate crisis over Cuba was resolved, high-level diplomacy continued. Neither nation desired such a dramatic break down in communications to occur again, so a direct hot line was established linking the Kremlin in Moscow and the Pentagon in Washington. Building further on the momentum, in July 1963 the Partial Test Ban Treaty was agreed, confining nuclear testing to underground sites only. It was not a perfect solution, but it was progress. And, in this case it was driven by the leaders of two superpowers who wanted to de-escalate a tense state of affairs.

Although early moves to regulate nuclear weapons were a mixed affair, the faith that Kennedy and Khrushchev put in building diplomacy was pivotal in the course of the Cold War and facilitated further progress in finding areas of agreement. In the years that followed the Cuban Missile Crisis, Cold War diplomacy entered a high watermark phase in what became known as a period of 'détente' between the superpowers as they sought to engage diplomatically with each other on a variety of issues, including a major arms limitation treaty. In that climate, progress was also made on nuclear proliferation.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty

Building on earlier progress, the 1970s opened with the entering into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1970) – often known as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Treaty sought to channel nuclear technology into civilian uses and to recognise the destabilising effect of further nuclear weapons proliferation on the international community. It was a triumph of diplomacy. The genius of the treaty was that it was aware of the realities of the international politics of the time. It was not a disarmament treaty as great powers would simply not give up their nuclear weapons, fearful their security would be diminished. So, instead of pursuing an impossible goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, the Non-Proliferation Treaty sought to freeze the number of nations that had nuclear weapons at the five nations which already possessed them: the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and China. Simultaneously, those five nations were encouraged to share non-military nuclear technology with other nations – such as civilian nuclear energy – so that those nations would not feel tempted to pursue nuclear weapons. In short, those who had nuclear weapons could keep them. Those who didn't have them would be allowed to benefit from the non-military research and innovation of the existing nuclear powers.

Due to the well-considered design of the treaty and its enforcement, it has been deemed highly successful. Following the end of the Cold War, the Non-Proliferation Treaty was permanently extended in 1995. Granted, it has not kept the number of nuclear nations to five, but there are still fewer than ten – which is far from the twenty or more projected by diplomats on both sides of the Atlantic before the treaty entered into force in 1970. States with nascent nuclear weapons programmes, such as Brazil and South Africa, gave them up due to international pressure to join the treaty. Today, only a small number of states are outside its bounds. India, Pakistan and Israel never joined as they (controversially in each case) had nuclear ambitions that they were not prepared to give up due to national security priorities. Underlining the weight of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, in 2003, when North Korea decided to rekindle earlier plans to develop nuclear weapons, they withdrew from the treaty rather than violate it. To date, North Korea remains the only nation to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The non-proliferation regime is not perfect of course – a situation best underlined by North Korea's quest to proliferate despite international will. It is also a system with an inherent bias, since a number of nations are allowed to have nuclear weapons simply because they were first to develop them – and this continues to be the case regardless of their behaviour. Yet, while humankind has developed the ultimate weapon in the nuclear bomb, diplomacy has managed to prevail in moderating its spread. When a nation is rumoured to be developing a nuclear bomb, as in the case of Iran, the reaction of the international community is always one of common alarm. In IR we call ideas that have become commonplace 'norms'. Due to skilful diplomacy in decades gone by, non-proliferation is one of the central norms underpinning our international system.

The US and Iran

Following the end of the Second World War, Iran found itself placed in a geostrategic hotspot. It shared a long border to its north with the Soviet Union and as a result acted as a geographical buffer to any Soviet moves into the Middle East. Iran's wider location, known as the Persian Gulf, was a region that contained the world's largest-known pool of oil – the steady supply of which was vital for the fuelling of Western-orientated economies. So, a coincidence of time, place, politics and economics judged Iran – in most ways a weak and underdeveloped state – important. When Iran's king, known as the Shah, found himself side-lined by a powerful left-leaning government, the United States, in league with the British, conspired to restore him to power via a

covert coup in 1953. During the Cold War the United States feared that leftward political developments in nations would result in a domestic communist revolution and/or an alliance with the communist Soviet Union. In certain cases, therefore, the United States took interventionist action to contain communism from spreading. The coup was a watermark in US-Iranian history. It set up a pattern of close relations that would last 25 years, as the Shah became a loyal ally of the United States in a volatile region. This volatility was not just due to Cold War geostrategic rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union. The wider region was embroiled in a series of crises caused by decolonisation and the resulting phenomenon of Arab nationalism, regional opposition to the creation of Israel, and a major ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan. Then, as now, this was a highly unstable area of the world to live in.

Iran has always been a nation that, despite different manifestations of its internal shape and character, has aspired to greater stature internationally, or at the very least regional predominance. For example, the Shah, whose autocratic rule was brought to an end by the 1979 revolution that erased his regime and created the Islamic Republic of Iran, harboured grand designs for Iran as the premier nation of the Middle East. This vision was shared by the United States, which armed Iran with advanced weaponry, of the non-nuclear kind, during the Shah's rule. The United States hoped its support of the Shah would allow him to widen and deepen Iranian power in order to help stabilise the region. Iran today is not much different to the Shah's Iran in the sense that it exists within the same borders and is a nation of the same peoples. However, a significant caveat is that the regional and global role Iran was to play under the Shah was largely in line with American desires, while the role envisioned by the Islamic Republic of Iran is deeply antagonistic to just about every facet of American politics. Hence, US-Iran relations are packed with insight and intrigue due to the history and divergent paths both nations have experienced.

The Iran hostage crisis

To connect our US-Iran case study to the issue of diplomacy, we do not need to look far beyond the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran to an episode known as *the Iran hostage crisis*. In November 1979 a gang of Iranian students invaded the US Embassy in Tehran, Iran's capital city, and captured the personnel they found there. This occurred after the Shah, who was in exile, had taken residence in New York for cancer treatment. The protesters demanded his return to stand trial for various crimes committed by his regime, such as torturing political dissidents. So the prisoners, most of them US diplomatic personnel, were taken hostage as a bargaining chip, their freedom offered in exchange for the return of the Shah. The United States and Iran found themselves in uncharted waters when Iran's new government, led by the once-exiled anti-Shah cleric Ruhollah Khomeini, officially sanctioned the hostage-taking.

Due to established diplomatic customs, an embassy – although hosted on foreign soil – is forbidden from being entered by the host state unless permission is given. So, when the Iranian protesters invaded the US Embassy in Tehran they violated a key feature of diplomacy developed over centuries to allow diplomats the freedom to do their work. This is why, to use a more contemporary example, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was able to avoid arrest by British police by taking up residence in an innocuous-looking terraced house in London – the house is the Embassy of Ecuador and police were refused entry. Strange as it may sound, police officers were then stationed outside the door waiting to arrest Assange should he decide to leave – an operation that has cost the British taxpayer millions of pounds. It is evident from the Assange example how highly such diplomatic customs are regarded by nations and how little this changes over time – even when those nations are in conflict.

In Iran's case, its disregard for established diplomatic principles was both shocking and extreme. Not only did it violate established diplomatic principles, but hostage-taking by a state is defined as a war crime under the Geneva Conventions. Predictably, the United States rejected Iran's demands and the hostage crisis became a tense diplomatic stand-off lasting 444 days. It turned Iran into an international pariah: there was worldwide outrage at its disregard not only for the rules of the international system but also for human decency as it paraded the hostages – bound and gagged – in front of news cameras. It also marked a new anti-Western political path for Iran, one in stark opposition to its pro-US stance during the time of the Shah. Despite the eventual freeing of the hostages in January 1981, the once-friendly nations had become foes. Following the crisis, all direct diplomatic links between the United States and Iran were severed until an issue of nuclear proliferation brought them to the same table over thirty years later.

Nuclear Iran

The idea of Iran possessing nuclear weapons is understandably controversial. Iran's known disregard for international laws and customs, as evidenced by the hostage crisis and reinforced by the regular accusation that it supports terrorist and radical groups, creates an atmosphere of mistrust in the international community. News of Iran's nuclear ambitions has been a point of major international diplomatic focus since 2002, when news leaked out that Iran had begun the development of a modern nuclear programme that showed signs of weaponisation (see Sinha and Beachy 2015 and Patrikarakos 2012). This was in spite of the

fact that Iran is a signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and therefore bound to neither receive nor develop nuclear arms. Iran protested that its programme was for civilian and peaceful purposes only. However, due to Iran's international profile, few believed this. Given that the United States had just declared its 'Global War on Terrorism' following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it was a tense period.

In 2002 the United States had no appetite for diplomacy with Iran over the nuclear issue. The US had already invaded Afghanistan in late 2001 and was preparing to invade Iraq in early 2003 as part of its campaign to rid the Middle East of regimes which might provide safe harbour to transnational terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda – the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. The United States also had a larger goal: to secure regime change in Iran, which it considered the world's leading state-sponsor of terrorism. Seen through that logic, a war on terror was meaningless if it did not target the world's chief terrorist. This would be done by demonstrating the might of the United States through its invasion of Iran's neighbours – note that Afghanistan borders Iran to the east and Iraq borders Iran to the west. This would then create internal pressure on Iran's leadership to reform of its own accord; it might even incite another revolution. If that failed, the United States was prepared to engage with Iran in some fashion in order to destroy its nuclear research facilities and possibly engineer regime change via military means, as it did in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is best encapsulated by president George W. Bush's oft-repeated phrase that 'all options are on the table' regarding dealing with Iran – outlined in more complete terms by the following passage from an official government document: The Iranian regime sponsors terrorism; threatens Israel; seeks to thwart Middle East peace; disrupts democracy in Iraq; and denies the aspirations of its people for freedom. "The nuclear issue and our other concerns can ultimately be resolved only if the Iranian regime makes the strategic decision to change these policies, open up its political system, and afford freedom to its people. This is the ultimate goal of U.S. policy. In the interim, we will continue to take all necessary measures to protect our national and economic security against the adverse effects of their bad conduct" (The National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2006, 20).

In that climate, diplomacy seemed a non-starter. However, an unlikely candidate entered the fray – the European Union (EU). In 2003, three EU nations, the UK, Germany and France, initiated high-level diplomacy with Iran in an attempt to prevent a war and introduce mediation to the situation. The talks were rejected by the United States, which refused to take part, given its above-mentioned objectives. For the European nations, diplomacy was worth pursuing. Despite the UK, France and Germany being traditional allies of the United States, there was no appetite in Europe for more war in the Middle East. The war in Iraq was controversial, as many – including the United Nations, which refused to mandate the war – did not accept its rationale. The 2003 invasion of Iraq also divided Europe politically and caused mass popular protests. In this context, engaging Iran was a bold move of diplomacy – effectively stepping in the way of the world's sole superpower when it was at its most belligerent. The talks were initially inconclusive, but they at least succeeded in engaging Iran in diplomacy, stalling its nuclear programme and offering a path to resolution other than confrontation.

In the years that followed invasion, military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan became deeply troubled as both nations (for different reasons) descended into instability. This required a longer-term, and more substantial, military presence by the United States than had been planned. As a result, the US became bogged down and was not in a position to realistically pursue a military strategy against Iran. Thus, it joined the EU-Iran talks, albeit reluctantly, in 2006. China and Russia also joined, making it a truly international diplomatic affair. It took almost a decade, but the parties finally reached agreement in July 2015. That agreement is a marvel of diplomacy. What were once mutually opposing positions characterised by decades of mistrust between the United States and Iran were painstakingly worked on by diplomats at all levels over many rounds of diplomacy until compromises acceptable to both sides were found.

Personal relationships between the diplomats were also built during the years of the negotiations, and these helped transcend state rivalries. Wendy Sherman, the US lead negotiator, recalled how she and her Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi, both became grandparents during their negotiations and shared videos of their grandchildren with each other. Personal relationships like this do not dissolve or change pre-set national interests on either side, but they were instrumental in both sides developing the resolve to work tirelessly and not give up until they were able to agree on key parameters. Similar personal relations were developed between officials at the highest level when they spent 17 days locked in intense discussions in Vienna during the concluding phase of the negotiations. Sherman later described the scene on the final day, with all the diplomatic personnel gathered together, as US Secretary of State John Kerry addressed the parties: "Secretary Kerry was the last person to speak. He recounted that when he was 21 he went off to war in Vietnam. He made a commitment that he would do whatever he could in his life to make sure that there was never war, ever again. The room was absolutely still. There was quiet. And then everyone, including the Iranians, applauded. Because, I think for all of us we understood that what we had done was to try to ensure peace, not war" (Sherman 2016).

Much like the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the key to the success of the diplomatic strategy underlining the agreement was to focus on verification rather than the seemingly impossible goal of establishing trust. The diplomats laboured in the one area where a resolution was possible and found a way to make it acceptable for both sides. For Iran this overtly involved the

phased removal of punitive economic sanctions that had been sponsored by the United States and also the tacit removal of any direct military threat. For the Americans, the deal placed Iran under a strict regime of verification to ensure that it cannot easily develop nuclear weapons, and if they appeared to be doing so there would be time for the international community to react before those weapons became useable. This is known as a 'breakout' period (see Broad and Peçanha 2015). Such a thing is only possible via an unprecedented system of strict international inspection of Iran's facilities, which Iran agreed to.

The resolution of the US-Iran nuclear standoff would not have been possible without the bold move of three European Union nations to start a diplomatic process during the tense year of 2003. Not only was a serious confrontation between Iran and the United States avoided, but the important non-proliferation principle that has become central to international relations was upheld by securing Iran's commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Iran nuclear deal, although a clear example of a diplomatic success in the face of tall odds, is contentious and fragile. It will need to weather multiple political shifts in the United States and Iran that might unseat it in years to come – and it does not remove the enmity between the states, which continue to mistrust each other. However, it may be seen in retrospect as the opening act on a path of rapprochement between the two nations that may gradually replace the toxic pattern of relations begun in 1979 with the hostage crisis. Even if the United States and Iran resume a path of confrontation, it does not take away from the triumph of diplomacy in this case, with nuclear weapons in the Middle East prevented from proliferating during a critical period and an alternative offered to what might have been a major war.

Conclusion

Diplomacy in the modern era, an era sometimes called the 'long peace' (Gaddis 1989) due to the absence of major war since 1945, has deepened and widened in complexity. Nowadays, it would be ill advised to base a description of diplomacy on actions short of, or in response to, war between states. Diplomacy today is integral to ensuring that our period of long peace gets longer and that the world we live in is as conducive as possible to the progress of the individual, as well as the state. As today's world is more linked and interdependent than ever before, effective and skilful diplomacy is vital to ensure that humankind can navigate an ever-growing list of shared challenges such as climate change, pandemics, transnational terrorism and nuclear proliferation that may be our undoing if left unresolved. So, while you may not know the names of many of those engaged in diplomatic endeavours, nor see much of their hard work credited in the media, their work is more important than ever to all of us.

Discussion Questions

1. How does McGlinchey define diplomacy?
2. How does diplomacy relate to foreign policy? Why is diplomacy "an essential tool required to operate successfully in today's international system"?
3. What does McGlinchey mean when he writes: "While readers of this book will be familiar with the concept of war to some extent due to its ubiquity in modern life, diplomacy may present itself as something alien or distant."
4. Describe the major developments in the diplomatic effort to regulate nuclear weapons.
5. Explain the following claims being sure to define the italicized bits: "In an environment as insecure as the Cold War, gaining a nuclear arsenal was a way to achieve *deterrence* and a *measure of security* that was not otherwise attainable. This was obviously *an attractive option for states*. For this reason, any hope of creating an international regime of moderation over nuclear weapons seemed doomed during the Cold War."
6. What does McGlinchey mean when he writes: "Due to skillful diplomacy in decades gone by, *non-proliferation* is one of *the central norms* underpinning our international system"?
7. Describe the major developments in diplomacy between the U.S. and Iran post-WWII.
8. Why did the US (and UK) support the overthrow of Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953? How did the Shah's regime lay the grounds for the Iranian Revolution in 1979?
9. Evaluate McGlinchey's claim that "[E]ven if the United States and Iran resume a path of confrontation, it does not take away from the triumph of diplomacy in this case, with nuclear weapons in the Middle East prevented from proliferating during a critical period and an alternative offered to what might have been a major war."
10. Explain and evaluate McGlinchey's conclusion: "As today's world is more linked and interdependent than ever before, effective and skillful diplomacy is vital to ensure that humankind can navigate an ever-growing list of shared challenges such as climate change, pandemics, transnational terrorism and nuclear proliferation that may be our undoing if left unresolved."

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Key Terms and Definitions

- **Asymmetric Warfare:** Conflict where weaker groups use unconventional tactics, such as guerrilla warfare, to challenge a stronger opponent.
- **Chemical Weapons:** Weapons that use toxic chemicals to harm or kill; banned under international law, though sometimes used in modern conflicts.
- **Conventional Wars:** Wars fought between state militaries using traditional weapons like guns, tanks, and planes.
- **Cyber Warfare:** The use of digital attacks by a state or non-state actor to disrupt or damage another country's infrastructure or defense systems.
- **Drones and Precision Warfare:** The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) to conduct targeted military strikes with high accuracy.
- **Framing:** The process by which political leaders present issues in specific ways to shape public perception and justify actions, such as war.
- **Geneva Conventions:** International treaties that establish legal standards for humanitarian treatment in war, protecting civilians and prisoners of war.
- **Guerrilla Warfare:** A form of irregular warfare in which small groups use hit-and-run tactics to fight a larger, more traditional military force.
- **Insurgent Warfare:** A type of conflict where rebel groups or insurgents engage in prolonged resistance against an established authority, often using unconventional tactics.
- **International Criminal Court (ICC):** A global judicial body that prosecutes individuals for war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity.
- **International Laws:** Legal frameworks governing state behavior in war, including the treatment of civilians and the conduct of combat operations.
- **Just War Theory:** A moral framework used to determine when it is justified to go to war (*jus ad bellum*) and how wars should be fought ethically (*jus in bello*).
- **Jus ad Bellum:** The criteria that must be met for a state to legitimately declare war, including self-defense and last resort.
- **Jus in Bello:** The principles that govern the conduct of war, focusing on proportionality and the protection of non-combatants.
- **Modern Warfare:** Contemporary conflicts that involve advanced technology, non-state actors, and unconventional tactics.
- **Nuclear Weapons:** Highly destructive weapons that use nuclear reactions to create massive explosions, serving as a deterrent in international conflicts.
- **Peacekeeping:** Efforts by international organizations, like the U.N., to deploy troops to conflict zones to maintain peace and protect civilians.
- **Securitization:** The process of framing an issue as an existential threat, often to justify extraordinary measures like military intervention.
- **Total War:** Warfare in which a state mobilizes all of its resources and population to achieve victory, often involving widespread destruction.
- **War:** Organized violence between two or more political entities—usually states or significant groups—leading to a high level of destruction and casualties.

8.13: Additional Readings

Scholarly Resources

Nagel, Thomas. 1972. "War and Massacre." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vol. 1, pp. 123-44.

Robinson, Paul ed. 2003. *Just War in a Comparative Perspective*. Ashgate.

Walzer, Michael. 1978. *Just and Unjust Wars*. Basic Books.

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8.14: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 8

1. Define war being sure to discuss each part of the definition.
2. Why does Realism (why do Realists) think war is inevitable? What are its causes according to Realism?
3. Describe Just War Theory in terms of Jus ad Bellum and Jus in Bello. What are the essential aspects of each?
4. How has technology impacted modern warfare?
5. What is Securitization and what are its consequences?
6. What has the international community done to regulate war and limit atrocities? How successful have these efforts been?
7. How has Global Terrorism impacted the landscape of modern warfare?

9: INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

Introduction

International Political Economy (IPE) is a field that bridges the gap between economics and politics on a global scale. It seeks to understand how political institutions, the economy, and international organizations interact and influence each other. In IPE, scholars analyze how states, markets, and non-state actors such as multinational corporations and international organizations create policies that redistribute wealth and power across the globe. The core question of IPE is how and why wealth is distributed unequally between countries, and what role political decisions play in these economic outcomes. IPE is crucial for understanding modern globalization, trade, and financial systems.

Historically, three major theoretical frameworks have dominated IPE: Mercantilism, Economic Liberalism, and Marxism. Each of these perspectives offers a distinct view of the international economy and the role of states in it. As we delve into these theories, we'll explore how they shape current policies and influence the global economic landscape.

Learning Objectives

- Compare Mercantilism, Economic Liberalism, and Marxism.
- Define globalization and examine its impact in terms of economic interdependence and anti-globalization.
- Analyze regional trade agreements.
- Evaluate the role of international financial institutions.
- Assess the environmental impact of globalization.

9.1: Mercantilism

9.2: Economic Liberalism

9.3: Marxism

9.4: Globalization and Economic Interdependence

9.5: International Trade and Trade Agreements

9.6: Regional Trade Agreements

9.7: International Financial Institutions and Global Governance

9.8: Financial Crises and Economic Stability

9.9: Globalization and Environmental Challenges

9.10: Conclusion

9.11: Deeper Dive- Global Political Economy

9.12: Glossary

9.13: Additional Readings

9.14: Discussion Questions

9.1: Mercantilism

Introduction to Mercantilism

Mercantilism is one of the oldest economic theories and dominated international economic thought from the 16th to the 18th century. Mercantilist policies were rooted in the belief that a nation's wealth was finite and tied to its stockpile of precious metals, primarily gold and silver. The more a country accumulated, the wealthier and more powerful it became. To achieve this, mercantilists advocated for strong government intervention in the economy, particularly through protectionist policies such as tariffs, subsidies, quotas, sanctions, embargoes, and colonial expansion.

Mercantilism views the global economy as a zero-sum game, where one nation's gain comes at the expense of another. Therefore, nations should minimize imports and maximize exports to maintain a favorable balance of trade. Colonialism and imperialism were direct outcomes of mercantilist policies, as European powers sought to control colonies for their resources and markets. For example, the British Empire's colonial policies in India were mercantilist in nature, as they extracted raw materials from India while forcing it to rely on British manufactured goods.

A modern-day example of mercantilist thought can be seen in certain protectionist policies adopted by governments, such as high tariffs and quotas to protect domestic industries from foreign competition. For instance, during the Trump administration, the U.S. implemented tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, claiming it was necessary to protect American jobs and industries. Critics argued that this mirrored mercantilist thinking, as it disrupted global supply chains and trade relationships.

9.2: Economic Liberalism

Introduction to Economic Liberalism

Economic liberalism emerged as a direct critique of mercantilism in the late 18th century, particularly through the works of Adam Smith and David Ricardo. The liberal approach argues that wealth is not finite, and economic interactions between countries should be viewed as a positive-sum game, where all participants can benefit from trade and cooperation. Rather than viewing international trade as a contest for limited resources, liberalism suggests that open markets and free trade increase efficiency and lead to mutual prosperity.

Adam Smith, in his seminal work *The Wealth of Nations*, introduced the concept of the invisible hand, arguing that individual pursuit of self-interest unintentionally benefits society as a whole. Smith believed that free markets and limited government intervention would lead to more efficient outcomes than mercantilist state controls. His theories were further developed by David Ricardo, who introduced the principle of comparative advantage. Ricardo argued that countries should specialize in producing goods they can produce more efficiently and trade for goods that other countries can produce at a lower opportunity cost. This principle laid the foundation for modern free trade agreements.

A contemporary example of economic liberalism is seen in the creation of multilateral trade agreements, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO works to reduce barriers to trade, such as tariffs and quotas, promoting free and open markets. One of the key successes of liberal economic policies is the European Union's single market, where member states trade freely with each other, allowing for greater specialization and economic integration across Europe. Similarly, NAFTA (now USMCA) facilitated trade between the United States, Canada, and Mexico, boosting trade and production efficiency across North America.

However, while economic liberalism emphasizes the benefits of free trade, it also faces criticism. Opponents argue that unfettered liberalism can exacerbate inequalities, as wealthier nations often benefit more from trade than developing countries. The rise of global inequality under liberal economic policies has sparked debates over how free markets should be regulated to ensure fair outcomes.

9.3: Marxism

Introduction to Marxism

While economic liberalism promotes the idea that free markets benefit all participants, Marxism offers a starkly different view, focusing on how capitalism creates and sustains global inequalities. Rooted in the works of Karl Marx, this perspective critiques the capitalist system, arguing that it inherently favors wealthy nations and multinational corporations at the expense of poorer countries and working-class individuals.

Marxists argue that the global economic system is structured to benefit the core (developed) countries, which exploit the periphery (developing) countries for their labor and resources. This leads to a situation where the rich get richer while the poor remain trapped in a cycle of dependency. This idea is central to Dependency Theory, which posits that developing nations are kept in a state of dependency on developed nations, preventing their full economic development. For example, Latin American scholars like Raúl Prebisch argued that global trade structures favored industrialized countries by keeping commodity prices low, while developing nations remained dependent on exporting raw materials.

Imperialism is also a key concept in Marxist thought. Vladimir Lenin, a Marxist theorist, described imperialism as the "highest stage of capitalism," where powerful capitalist nations expand their influence globally to control markets and resources. This was evident during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when European powers scrambled for colonies in Africa and Asia, exploiting them for economic gain. A modern example of economic imperialism can be seen in the influence of multinational corporations and international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Critics argue that the IMF's loan conditions often impose austerity measures that disproportionately harm the poor in debtor nations, perpetuating global inequality.

In today's global economy, Marxist critiques continue to resonate in discussions about global inequality and the exploitation of labor in the developing world. For instance, the rise of fast fashion brands that outsource production to low-wage countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam highlights how global capitalism can exploit labor for profit, leaving workers in unsafe conditions with little pay. This has sparked movements advocating for fair trade, labor rights, and sustainable development.

9.4: Globalization and Economic Interdependence

Introduction to Globalization and Economic Interdependence

Globalization has been one of the most significant economic transformations of the past few decades, deeply influencing international political economy. It refers to the increasing interconnectedness of economies, cultures, and societies across borders, driven by advances in technology, transportation, and communication. The rise of the internet, faster transportation methods, and the expansion of global trade networks have dramatically increased the speed and scope of globalization.

One of the key features of globalization is economic interdependence—the idea that the economies of nations are increasingly reliant on one another. This interdependence can lead to mutual benefits, as countries trade goods and services, share technology, and collaborate on global projects. For example, the supply chains of many products are now global in nature. A smartphone might be designed in the U.S., assembled in China, using components sourced from Germany and raw materials mined in Africa. This interdependence has led to lower costs of goods for consumers, greater innovation, and access to a wider range of products.

However, globalization has not been without its challenges. While it has increased wealth in many parts of the world, it has also led to the exploitation of labor, particularly in developing countries where wages are low, and labor protections are weak. Additionally, globalization has contributed to environmental degradation, as the increased movement of goods and industrial production has accelerated the depletion of natural resources and increased pollution.

A significant political consequence of globalization has been the rise of anti-globalization movements in both developed and developing nations. In the West, growing concerns over job losses, wage stagnation, and the erosion of local industries have led to the rise of populist movements, which call for stronger borders, trade protectionism, and a rejection of multinational agreements. The Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, for example, was partly driven by a desire to regain control over economic policies and resist what many saw as the negative consequences of globalization.

9.5: International Trade and Trade Agreements

Introduction to International Trade and Trade Agreements

International trade refers to the exchange of goods, services, and capital across international borders, and it has been a central driver of economic growth and globalization for centuries. Trade agreements between countries help facilitate the free flow of goods by reducing barriers such as tariffs, quotas, and subsidies, creating a more integrated global market. Organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) play a crucial role in regulating international trade and resolving disputes between nations.

Economic trade is a powerful tool of diplomacy, used by nations to foster cooperation, build alliances, and influence global relations. By engaging in trade agreements and partnerships, countries can strengthen diplomatic ties, create mutual dependencies, and promote stability. Trade can serve as an incentive for countries to maintain peaceful relations, as economic interdependence makes conflict less desirable. Additionally, nations often use trade sanctions or embargoes as diplomatic tools to pressure other countries into changing their policies or behaviors without resorting to military action. Through trade, countries not only pursue economic benefits but also exert diplomatic influence, shaping global politics.

One of the most important examples of modern trade agreements is NAFTA (now the USMCA), which created a free trade zone between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. This agreement allowed goods to move across borders with minimal restrictions, benefiting industries that rely on cross-border supply chains, such as automotive manufacturing. Similarly, the European Union (EU) single market has integrated the economies of its member states, allowing for the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people.

While trade agreements promote economic efficiency and growth, they can also be controversial. Some industries benefit more than others, and domestic job losses in sectors like manufacturing have led to political opposition to free trade in countries like the United States. This was seen when NAFTA was renegotiated into the USMCA due to concerns over job outsourcing to Mexico, where labor is cheaper. While the new agreement introduced stronger labor protections, it did not eliminate concerns about the impact of free trade on domestic industries.

9.6: Regional Trade Agreements

Introduction to Regional Trade Agreements

Regional trade agreements (RTAs) are deals between a group of countries that seek to reduce or eliminate barriers to trade among themselves. These agreements often go beyond what global trade organizations can achieve, allowing for deeper economic cooperation and integration within specific regions.

The European Union's single market is the most prominent example of regional economic integration. By eliminating tariffs and harmonizing regulations, EU member states have created a large, unified market that enables businesses to operate across borders more efficiently. This has increased trade within Europe and made it easier for companies to scale their operations. Similarly, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has created a free trade area, promoting trade among its member countries and reducing their dependence on external markets.

While regional trade agreements have numerous benefits, they also create challenges for non-member countries. For example, Brexit—the United Kingdom's exit from the EU—has led to significant trade disruptions between the UK and the remaining EU members. British companies now face new tariffs and regulatory hurdles when exporting to Europe, making trade more expensive and complex. This has been particularly challenging for sectors like agriculture and automotive manufacturing, where integrated supply chains rely on frictionless trade across borders.

Regional agreements also sometimes face internal challenges. For instance, in ASEAN, member countries have varying levels of economic development, which can lead to disagreements over trade policy and market access. While the region benefits from increased trade, smaller or less developed countries may struggle to compete with wealthier nations, leading to uneven economic gains.

9.7: International Financial Institutions and Global Governance

Introduction to International Financial Institutions and Global Governance

International financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank play a critical role in stabilizing the global economy and fostering development aid in poorer nations. These institutions provide financial assistance and technical expertise to countries facing economic challenges, such as balance of payments crises, natural disasters, or underdevelopment.

The IMF was established to promote global monetary cooperation and financial stability by providing short-term loans to countries in need. It helps countries stabilize their economies during periods of financial instability by offering financial support and economic advice. For example, during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the IMF provided bailout packages to several European countries, including Greece, Ireland, and Portugal, helping them recover from severe economic downturns and restoring confidence in global financial markets.

The World Bank, by contrast, focuses on long-term development projects in areas such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare. It provides financial assistance to developing countries to help reduce poverty and promote economic growth. For instance, the World Bank has funded the construction of roads, schools, and healthcare facilities in sub-Saharan Africa, contributing to economic development in some of the world's poorest regions.

However, the role of these institutions is not without controversy. Critics argue that the conditions attached to IMF loans—such as austerity measures and structural reforms—can sometimes exacerbate economic problems by reducing public spending on essential services like healthcare and education. Similarly, while the World Bank's projects aim to improve infrastructure and reduce poverty, some have raised concerns about the environmental and social impacts of large-scale development projects.

9.8: Financial Crises and Economic Stability

Introduction to Financial Crises and Economic Stability

Financial crises can have devastating effects on global economies, as seen during the 2008 Global Debt Crisis. The crisis, which originated in the U.S. housing market, quickly spread to other parts of the world, leading to a sharp contraction in global trade, rising unemployment, and a collapse in asset prices. Governments and central banks around the world implemented emergency measures, such as bailouts and stimulus packages, to prevent a total collapse of the financial system.

One of the lessons learned from the 2008 crisis is the importance of maintaining strong regulatory frameworks to prevent financial instability. In the aftermath of the crisis, countries introduced new regulations to improve the transparency and stability of financial institutions. For example, the Dodd-Frank Act in the United States sought to prevent another financial meltdown by increasing oversight of banks and financial markets.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a different type of economic shock, with a sudden and severe impact on global supply chains, consumer demand, and employment. COVID-19 was exasperated by globalization and the movement of people. Governments responded by implementing large-scale stimulus packages, such as the CARES Act in the United States, which provided direct financial support to individuals and businesses. These measures helped mitigate the economic fallout of the pandemic, although the recovery has been uneven across different sectors and countries. Crises like these highlight the interconnectedness of the global economy and the importance of swift, coordinated responses to economic shocks. The ability of governments and international institutions to respond effectively can mean the difference between a short-term recession and a prolonged depression.

9.9: Globalization and Environmental Challenges

Introduction to Globalization and Environmental Challenges

The rapid expansion of global trade and industrialization has had a significant impact on the environment. Climate change, resource depletion, and pollution are some of the most pressing environmental challenges linked to economic growth. As globalization has increased the movement of goods and services across borders, it has also placed immense pressure on the planet's natural resources.

One of the major environmental concerns is the rise in greenhouse gas emissions due to industrial production and transportation. Countries with large manufacturing sectors, such as China and India, have experienced rapid economic growth but also face serious environmental challenges as a result. For instance, China's rapid industrialization has led to widespread air pollution, deforestation, and the overuse of natural resources, prompting the government to introduce stricter environmental regulations and invest in renewable energy.

The global response to climate change has been coordinated through international agreements such as the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global warming by reducing carbon emissions. Many countries are investing in green technologies like solar and wind power to transition away from fossil fuels and create more sustainable economies. Efforts to balance economic growth with environmental protection are often referred to as sustainable development. This approach seeks to ensure that economic progress does not come at the expense of the environment. For example, the European Union has committed to reducing carbon emissions by 55% by 2030 as part of its European Green Deal, a plan to make Europe the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The UN has Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - 17 global goals established in 2015 focused on achieving a better and more sustainable future for all by the year 2030.

9.10: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

The first part of this chapter explored the major theoretical approaches in International Political Economy, including Mercantilism, Economic Liberalism, and Marxism. Additionally, it has examined the profound impact of globalization on economic interdependence, trade, and inequality. As we move into political economy in practice, the focus shifts toward understanding how international trade agreements, financial institutions, and development strategies shape the global economy in even greater depth.

The second part of this chapter explored the complexities of global trade, financial systems, and development in the international political economy. By examining trade agreements, financial institutions, and responses to economic crises, this section highlights how interconnected the global economy has become. As one considers these forces, it's important to recognize the challenges and opportunities that globalization, development, and environmental sustainability present for the future of international economics.

9.11: Deeper Dive- Global Political Economy

Walzenbach's "Global Political Economy"

Global political economy is a field of study that deals with the interaction between political and economic forces. At its centre have always been questions of human welfare and how these might be related to state behaviour and corporate interests in different parts of the world. Despite this, major approaches in the field have often focused more on the international system perspective. A side effect of this has been the relative neglect of non-elites and an all-too-often missing recognition of ordinary individuals. While states remain central to international politics, they have gradually intensified their relations with multinational corporations and strengthened their engagement with international organisations. Naturally, these changes in the world around us have led to a certain rethinking of the way we understand and position individuals as actors in the global economy. To account for this, many scholars now prefer to use the term 'global political economy' (GPE) over the more traditional term 'international political economy' (IPE). Although both terms are often used interchangeably, using the word 'global' is important as it indicates a wider scope in political economy that reaches beyond relations between states.

There are various approaches to global political economy that span the political spectrum and often overlap with the perspectives covered in chapters three and four – though they are often formulated differently to incorporate economic factors. These range from state-centred approaches to Marxist approaches that argue that international capitalism will lead to the end of the state due to capitalism's inherent flaws. Arguably, it has been the liberal approach that has given individual actors (rather than states or social groups) the centre stage for analysis. As such, liberal approaches to global political economy form the bedrock of this chapter as they offer a more tangible way to present complex issues of global economics to a beginner in a way that is relatable.

Liberal approaches

The writings of liberal political economists have become so broad a church that they can include advocates of uncontrolled markets as well as supporters of strong state intervention in the market. This is a reflection of some of the practical contradictions that Karl Polanyi (1957) first discovered in different historical manifestations of liberal ideas in the aftermath of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century. Consider, in this respect, whether government policy takes freedom of choice away from individuals, or if the state should establish a legal order that enables individuals to make choices and function as participants in a market system. Polanyi's reasoning offers an insight into the globalising economy of the twenty-first century. In this account, markets are not just abstract constructs that settle demand and supply for goods through a specific price, as economists would make us believe. Markets are, and always have been, much more. They are social phenomena embedded in broader communities and directly connected with deliberate forms of state action. As a consequence, economic, social and political life is always interconnected. In particular, the widely held belief in the advantage of a self-regulating market process carries with it a basic contradiction in so far as it leads inevitably to a severe disruption of the social fabric in different countries. This disruption can occur because of rising levels of income inequality (why some are paid more than others), foreign takeovers of companies, or fundamental disagreement on what needs to be done during economic recessions to prevent social decay.

Essentially, Polanyi observed two interrelated processes that explain change in the international system. At first, free market principles dominate and the winners from liberal economic policies exert their influence for further political change. Over time, however, the political pressures created will inevitably generate a counter-movement that is opposed to the direction of reform. Other social groups within society will articulate their interests, slow down the speed of modernisation and demand a different form of economic management and policy making. Seen from this angle, the global political economy of the twenty-first century is an attempt to embed globalising markets in transnational social relations – quite similar to what we observed historically in terms of social and economic development at the level of the nation-state.

The early heroes of the liberal approach were Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Smith argued in favour of government non-interference and the superiority of market exchanges guided by the 'invisible hand' of the price mechanism. This is a process whereby consumers seek the best quality for the lowest price and this, in turn, compels successful producers to find the lowest-cost method of production. Ricardo explicitly added the gains deriving from a system of free trade built around the principle of comparative advantage. Accordingly, 'under a system of perfectly free commerce, each country naturally devotes its capital and labour to such employments as are most beneficial to each'. And, 'this pursuit of individual advantage is admirably connected with the universal good of the whole' (Ricardo 1817). From this point, international trade liberalisation has been seen as a useful mechanism allocating labour to its most productive uses allowing in turn a much greater consumption of goods than what would

be possible in the absence of such a system.

For Smith, the specialisation in working patterns and the division of labour also created new opportunities for employees to achieve personal growth and professional careers. In the classic example, ten people working to produce pins could produce more in total if they worked together, dividing up tasks and performing each one better than if they all worked separately. Where Karl Marx identified repetitive work patterns and exploitation, early liberal political economy found skills, self-love and natural propensity (O'Brien and Williams 2010, 259). Taking these arguments into the modern era, if governments across the world deregulated economic activity, cut taxes for the wealthy, privatised and contracted out traditional state services, then unprecedented levels of economic growth would follow. By allowing the free movement of capital, many more people can benefit from high levels of direct investment even if employees are less mobile and more tied to a particular workplace. Thus, in the modern liberal world view, often called neoliberalism, governments are expected to be active promoters and supporters of globalisation. Only left-leaning liberals, by contrast, recognise the increasingly global division of labour as responsible for rising levels of inequality.

What unifies liberal thinking in terms of global economics is an analytical inclusion of a variety of state and non-state actors that form relationships of mutual dependence. Therefore, the historical focus of one country being dependent on another due to a surplus in a vital commodity, like oil or gas, has gradually given way to a much more complex understanding. This does not mean that the classic interaction between states has become obsolete, rather that it is enriched by including and explicitly recognising an ever-increasing number of other international actors such as those explored in chapters five, six and seven. Hence, the policies of one international or regional organisation may rely on the policies of another. This has been the case with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund in the management of the 2008 global financial crisis as they adopted joint programmes to assist states such as Ireland. Another example is the successful implementation of a global environmental policy by the United Nations that benefitted significantly from collaboration with Greenpeace, an international non-governmental organisation. In the literature, however, it has been the multinational corporation (a private business operation with facilities and assets in at least two countries) that has received the most attention in the search for interdependent relationships across borders. Here, as elsewhere, the liberal account does show its broad remit, leaving room for positive evaluation as well as critical reflection. Some liberals praise the overall benefit from competition for international investments played out on the back of the rivalry between states and multinational corporations. Others, by contrast, stress the comparative disadvantage and limited success of less well-funded civil society actors when trying to change corporate behaviour on a global scale.

Individual actors

A convenient way to accommodate individual actors in the global economy has been to see them as economically dependent workers rather than as citizens capable of bringing about social change. The economic globalisation process has modified this perspective to some extent, with greater recognition of the integration of a diverse, but nationally based, workforce into production patterns that can span several sovereign jurisdictions and world regions. This is in contrast to what was mentioned above in classical approaches that envisioned goods and services produced from start to finish within a nation-state rather than anticipating the system of today where production spans across borders. Technological changes have made it possible to control transnational production processes and bring together people from different parts of the world to add value to a specific good or service. By engaging in this practice enterprises can transform their business into a global operation thriving on different wage levels and a diverse set of skills in the workforce. This naturally raises the question of how such changes in the organisation of capitalism influence the lives of everyday people. For example, if people produce only part of a good, such as a microchip for a computer, how are their wages determined?

More recently, the 2008 global financial crisis has shed light on non-elite actors at the receiving end of failures in the banking system and the reckless behaviour of financial elites. Not just blue and white-collar workers, but mortgage holders, house buyers, owners of small and medium-sized businesses, small-scale investors, shareholders, farmers, civil servants, self-employed people and students had to struggle with the implications of rescue efforts taking place simultaneously in several of the major industrialised countries. In the aftermath of government intervention and bail-out measures, many businesses had to restructure and streamline their operations for the sake of cutting costs and maintaining competitiveness. At the same time, individuals in their capacity as voters were asked to support far-reaching reform packages, austerity policies and new government strategies for job creation and employability. Non-elites have also been able to promote new alliances among a range of individual actors with more charitable goals such as income redistribution and equality in mind. Many left-leaning political economists have therefore placed their hope in transnational solidarity and broader social movements unified under the banner of alter-globalisation – which styles itself as an alternative to neoliberal forms of globalisation.

A fundamental requirement for any such processes to work is an increasing number of people-to-people contacts developing various types of cross-border relationships. International migration offers an example where Polanyi's key argument is relevant. Although governments have closely cooperated for the sake of liberalising the flow of goods, services, and capital, the same

cannot be said about the flow of people. Restrictions to migration movements have become the rule rather than the exception. In a market economy, key decisions about investment, production and distribution are driven by supply and demand. This has led, as a side effect, to diverging approaches to migration control within liberal political systems. Canada, for example, was the first nation to implement a points-based system by which entry visas are granted on the basis of specialist skills or aptitude tests. Moreover, relative population density and regional distribution is also taken into consideration when residency permits are linked to particular jobs or states within the federal system. Such restrictions on personal freedom are accepted precisely to achieve a better goodness of fit with the demand side for immigration and the requirements of regional economies. Only gradually, and over time, are individual restrictions reduced, thus slowing down the pressures for adaptation that is expected from new arrivals as well as society as a whole.

Another example of the Polanyi-type adjustment process can be found in the area of philanthrocapitalism. These accounts show personal characteristics and entrepreneurial spirit through the activities of billionaires such as Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, George Soros and Mark Zuckerberg. This elitist circle is not just known for its wealth, but also for individual ambitions to transcend the business world and influence political leaders in their decision-making process. Through the funding of global campaigns, each of these entrepreneurs has tried to make a difference in terms of poverty reduction, public health, educational reform and democratisation. In other words, corporate elites are actively translating individual success into altruistic behaviour on a global level. Broadly speaking, the institutional arrangements surrounding philanthrocapitalism help to safeguard core business activities while branching out into new sectors with genuine global reach and potential. The individual actors of this emerging system use their personal wealth to construct new global policy networks that specifically include individuals from governmental and non-governmental organisations susceptible to a particular vision of the future (Cooper 2010, 229). Therefore, personal gain, shareholder benefits or compensation for aggressive business tactics may not be at the forefront of their considerations. Instead, corporate social responsibility in this interpretation can be seen as a form of enlightened self-interest, recognising the danger of a potential backlash from society at large to excessive market power and business influence.

The Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative is a useful example of philanthrocapitalism. Its aims are to administer the donation of 99 per cent of the married couple's Facebook shares to a range of global projects, which amounts to tens of billions of US dollars. Its founders chose the institutional form of a limited liability company (LLC) rather than extending the model of a charitable trust or social fund to the global level. This ensures that as an organisational form it can continue to generate profit and donate money to specific political causes. More traditional non-profit organisations have stricter requirements for the disclosure of information to qualify for tax exemptions, whereas LLCs have fewer rules in this respect and still allow for investment in profit-driven projects in addition to philanthropic activities. Thus, this type of business structure offers new degrees of flexibility to move shares between separate business operations and to extract profits for the owners, if so required. In this way, the core of the Facebook business model that generates the wealth held by Chan and Zuckerberg remains unchanged. The ambition to do good at a global level is clearly counterbalanced by the need to generate revenue and income through a lucrative commercial service.

Whether financially successful entrepreneurs with celebrity status can have a truly transformative capacity when it comes to the finding of solutions for international policy problems is open to debate. Their activities, as observed at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, at least suggest that they are increasingly recognised as important contributors to global public policy. Fame and fortune, however, is not always the main criterion to be part of an international gathering. The independently organised World Social Forum is deliberately non-elitist in that it welcomes a broad range of civil society organisations and social movements to its annual convention. The 2016 meeting in Montreal, Canada, carried the slogan 'another world is needed – together it is possible' and aimed to 'gather tens of thousands of people ... who want to build a sustainable and inclusive world, where every person and every people has its place and can make its voice heard'. What both events have in common is the continuing effort to build transnational alliances that gradually dissolve any neat distinction between the public and the private sphere and make the global count in the study of political economy.

The state and the multinational corporation

The industrialised state of the twenty-first century is going through significant stages of adaptation and transformation in response to economic globalisation and losing its privileged position in the international system. Not only the rising powers of Brazil, Russia, India and China but also multinational corporations represent a serious challenge to its once dominant role. There is now little expectation that major economies will adopt a light regulation economic policy style along the lines of the once dominant US model. Instead, the notion of the competition state captures best how since the 1990s government actors have created more business-friendly regulatory frameworks actively supporting internationally operating firms in their efforts to generate more growth and employment opportunities. A well-trained domestic workforce becomes, in this context, an important asset to promote a particular territory for the allocation of foreign direct investment.

Despite similar pressures to reduce government expenditure, states have also continued to diverge in the way they provide welfare

for different social groups within their societies. It has become popular to privatise public services and leave the task of their delivery to companies rather than the state. As a consequence, the role of the civil servant is now similar to that of a business manager overseeing the spread of markets into new areas such as education, health and security. Yet, in line with the Polanyi-type adjustment process, government agencies and state organisations cannot entirely shed their responsibility for some of the negative effects of radical policies associated with market liberalisation, especially in trade and finance. Economic globalisation creates 'winners' and 'losers', which leads to the issue of inequality in societies. To win the support of the 'losers', governments typically have to offer compensatory measures through income redistribution, retraining programmes or further educational opportunities. The budgetary resources necessary for the funding of such activities brings into perspective taxation as a main attribute of modern forms of government as well as an indicator of state power relative to other actors in the international system. As the international controversy around the tax bills of large multinational corporations like Amazon has shown, there is a general public expectation that multinational corporations should make a fair contribution to the states in which they generate their profit. After all, for their business models to succeed they have to be able to draw on a well-developed infrastructure, an educated workforce and general health care.

Furthermore, through direct tax evasion, or the use of regulatory loopholes, large corporations may gain a decisive advantage over local suppliers operating in the same market sector and offering comparable services. For example, due to different tax laws within member states of the European Union, the video streaming service Netflix International was exempt from UK corporation tax despite having around 4.5 million paying customers in the UK. In line with the letter of the law, it only paid 5 per cent income tax in Luxembourg. Although this is a regional example, multinational companies with global operations can also shift profits to countries where lower taxes apply by transferring royalties between different branches of their business. What emerges is a picture of waning state power with global business actors playing off different tax regimes to their own advantage. Seen from their angle, multinational corporations are merely following the rules of the game as implemented by governments in their national systems. If the rules change, their behaviour will change as well. Indeed, due to public pressures there seems to be evidence of a step change in this issue, at least in Europe where corporations like Google and Starbucks have been reprimanded.

Multinational corporations in their interaction with civil society have sometimes been the target of non-governmental pressure groups and trade unions, which call for boycotts due to breaches of international environmental or labour standards. More frequently, however, liberal approaches have singled out their exceptional capacity to create wealth at a national, as well as international, level. Their cross-border investment activities in home or host states are often assessed positively as they ensure technology and capital transfer, develop managerial skills in diverse country contexts and ensure market access while simultaneously creating new jobs, thus providing a 'social' service in lieu of those typically seen as justifying the state and, therefore, excusing them from taxes. In the case of Apple this has taken the form of a global supply chain by which the bulk of its products are designed in the United States, but manufactured elsewhere – predominantly in China – due to lower costs. This is also an indication of the impact technological change in the production process has on the multinational corporation–state relationship. Seen from the Polanyi angle it is no surprise that when Apple's chief executive officer Steve Jobs was asked by US president Barack Obama why manufacturing could not return to the US, he simply replied, 'Those jobs aren't coming back' (Duhigg and Bradsher 2012). Even the most powerful national politicians find it hard to deal with the social consequences of these technological innovations in the global market.

Towards global economic governance?

One popular way to react to the fundamental changes in the production sphere described above has been the signing of regional and global trade agreements. At times this is combined with further steps towards market integration and intensified political cooperation among nation-states. The exponential growth of such deals has generated a major controversy in the field about whether regional and global organisations constitute a new ideal for the international economic system, making it possible to align the multitude of potential actors for the purpose of creating effective global policies.

The widespread appeal of regional governance is shown by the prominent examples of regional groupings loosely modelled on the example of the European Union. This can be seen primarily in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The evidence available so far is inconclusive as to whether regional organisations can act as the final stepping-stone or, perhaps, present a major stumbling block for the emergence of a genuine form of governance in the global system. In the case of the European Union a prime purpose has been to build a single market, but in many areas this has necessitated a range of measures to deal with some of the undesirable consequences of market liberalisation. For the sake of economic prosperity all European Union member states agreed to remove trade barriers and reform some of their domestic regulations, while at the same time devising measures through which particular groups within society are entitled to direct financial compensation. Through its own legislative process, the European Union has also been actively trying to cushion some of the effects of an open market by enforcing environmental targets, health and safety standards and guarantees for equal

opportunities.

The scope of the European Union has also revealed some of the difficulties of regional projects, with member states sometimes wishing to 'opt out' of certain areas when they are not in agreement with regional plans – such as adopting the euro currency. An extreme instance of this can be seen in the British vote to leave the European Union in the 2016 'Brexit' referendum. In a wider sense, negotiation rounds for global trade deals, as opposed to regional ones, have stalled and protectionist behaviour for whole industrial sectors has been on the rise. Although tariffs are at unprecedented low levels globally, it has proved much harder to further harmonise national business regulations and guarantee mutual market access. If the aim is to achieve higher growth rates, enhance consumer choice and create more jobs, then hidden trade barriers have to be tackled much more effectively at the global negotiation table. The liberal ambition to take transnational civil society more seriously also comes at a price. Keenly aware of the historical record and detrimental effects of free trade deals, critics are deeply concerned about the repercussions that new large-scale, inter-regional agreements might have. In different parts of the world voters and interest groups have become increasingly sensitive to the impact of trade liberalisation on labour standards, worker rights, income distribution and environmental sustainability.

More generally, there is a problem with the very institutions of global governance in how they settle a trade-off between their democratic accountability and effective economic policymaking. In the case of the World Trade Organization (WTO), with 164 member states, the implementation of trade rules is not easily reconciled with the demands articulated by international non-governmental organisations such as Greenpeace. These frequently hold the view that the management of international organisations has been captured by a few powerful countries, undermining their role as honest brokers, mediators and enforcers of joint policies (Stiglitz 2002). At the same time, not everyone agrees that giving non-state groups advisory status and better access to the organisation's internal decision-making would solve the dilemma. Due to the intergovernmental character of the World Trade Organization, its democratic legitimacy is set in a 'one country, one vote' system where the governing body consists of trade ministers delegated by the member states.

From the angle of democratic accountability things look even more problematic in other global economic institutions. Most notably, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which is charged with the task of ensuring economic stability around the world. The International Monetary Fund allocates voting rights proportional to the size of financial contributions made by its 189 member states. At grassroots level critical voices view this as fundamentally contradicting the organisation's goal of global policy change and economic reform. They see a desperate need for new social mass movements to address the failings of deregulated capitalism, build working arrangements for global governance and arrive eventually at a fairer world. Despite pessimistic assessments of the viability of such a system of global governance, an element of optimism can be gained from historical experience of bottom-up community building and the transformative power of human agency (Hale et al. 2013). Although there is always the risk that the political adjustment process at transnational level may offer too little too late, the historical work of Polanyi suggests with a degree of certainty that, under exceptional circumstances, previously passive individual actors – the 'silent majority' in conservative terminology – can proactively instigate large-scale institutional change.

Conclusion

The examples presented in this chapter highlight the diverse social and political adjustment processes that a largely unregulated global market system necessarily entails. While we certainly live in a global economy, for the time being we lack a common response to the challenges this brings. The analytical turn from the international to the global, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, alerts us to the fact that change has occurred – though measuring its trajectory is difficult due to the fragmented array of actors and agendas evident at the global level. Liberal approaches stress the inevitability of economic globalisation but place some hope in the responsiveness of particular global actors as long as their activities are made accountable. Accordingly, praise of market mechanisms as a force for good across the globe has been matched by ever-growing demand for reforms enabling ordinary people to share more the spoils of the system rather than being exploited by it. As long as democratic processes such as elections are strongly tied to domestic political communities, a still-evolving global market system built around liberal principles continues to present a serious challenge. If for our own individual benefit we believe there should be an element of control over this process, then regional and international organisations with the power to devise and implement global rules are the natural place to look. Without denying the impact of other factors such as philanthropic acts, or states acting alone, these are a second-best solution in the absence of an effectively coordinated global economic policy.

Discussion Questions

1. Define Political Economy and distinguish between International Political Economy (IPE) and Global Political Economy (GPE).
2. What does it mean to say that the economic, social, and political are interrelated?

3. What are the positive and negative aspects of all market systems?
4. What is Neoliberalism and what are its policy prescriptions?
5. Describe the role of individuals, groups, states, MNCs, regional and international organizations in economic policy making.
6. Describe the challenges MNCs pose to states when it comes to political economy.
7. What does Walzenbach argue are the challenges associated with global economic governance?

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Key Terms and Definitions

- **Adam Smith:** A Scottish economist and philosopher, considered the father of modern economics. His 1776 work, *The Wealth of Nations*, introduced the concept of the invisible hand and argued for free markets and minimal government intervention in the economy.
- **Bailout:** Financial assistance provided by governments or financial institutions to prevent the collapse of failing businesses or economies.
- **Comparative Advantage:** A principle developed by David Ricardo that argues countries should specialize in producing the goods they can produce most efficiently relative to other countries. This specialization and trade will lead to mutual benefits, even if one country is more efficient in producing all goods.
- **David Ricardo:** A British economist who developed the theory of comparative advantage, which suggests that countries should specialize in producing goods they can produce most efficiently, and trade for goods they produce less efficiently. His ideas laid the foundation for modern free trade theory.
- **Deforestation:** The large-scale removal of forests, often to clear land for agriculture or development, leading to environmental impacts such as habitat loss and increased carbon emissions.
- **Debt Crises:** Situations in which governments are unable to pay their debts, leading to economic instability and requiring external financial assistance or restructuring.
- **Development Aid:** Financial assistance provided by wealthier countries or international organizations to help promote economic development and improve living conditions in developing nations.
- **Dodd-Frank Act:** A U.S. law passed in response to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, aimed at increasing financial regulation and preventing future economic crises by improving oversight of financial institutions.
- **Embargoes:** A government order that restricts or bans trade with a particular country. Embargoes are often used as a political tool to pressure countries to change their policies or actions.
- **Exports:** Goods and services that are produced in one country and sold to other countries. A high level of exports is often associated with economic strength and a positive balance of trade.
- **Free Markets:** An economic system where prices for goods and services are determined by supply and demand, with minimal government intervention. Free markets are central to economic liberalism and contrast with the protectionist policies of mercantilism.
- **Global Trade:** The exchange of goods, services, and capital across international borders, promoting economic growth and interdependence between nations.
- **Imports:** Goods and services that are brought into a country from abroad for sale or consumption. A country's import level reflects its demand for foreign goods.
- **Industrialization:** The process by which countries transform from primarily agricultural economies to those based on manufacturing and industry, often accompanied by urbanization and technological advancements.
- **International Political Economy (IPE):** A field of study that examines the relationship between politics and economics on a global scale, focusing on how international trade, financial systems, and political institutions shape the distribution of wealth and power among countries.
- **Invisible Hand:** A concept introduced by Adam Smith to describe how individuals pursuing their self-interest unintentionally contribute to the overall economic well-being of society. The "invisible hand" guides free markets toward efficiency and prosperity without the need for government intervention.
- **Mercantilism:** An economic theory from the 16th to 18th centuries that emphasizes the accumulation of wealth, particularly gold and silver, by maintaining a favorable balance of trade. Mercantilist policies advocate for strong government intervention, such as tariffs and subsidies, to protect domestic industries and increase exports over imports.
- **NAFTA (now the USMCA):** A regional trade agreement between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, originally known as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), now replaced by the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) to promote trade by reducing tariffs and trade barriers.
- **Pollution:** The introduction of harmful substances or products into the environment, causing damage to ecosystems, human health, and the atmosphere.
- **Positive-Sum Game:** An economic situation in which all participating parties can benefit from trade and cooperation, as opposed to a zero-sum game, where one party's gain comes at another's loss. Economic liberalism promotes the idea of international trade as a positive-sum game.
- **Protectionism:** Economic policies designed to protect domestic industries from foreign competition by imposing tariffs, quotas, or other restrictions on imports. Protectionism is a key feature of mercantilism and contrasts with free trade.
- **Quotas:** Limits on the quantity of a particular good that can be imported or exported during a specific time period. Quotas are used to protect domestic industries by restricting foreign competition.

- **Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs):** Trade agreements between specific groups of countries aimed at reducing tariffs and trade barriers within the region, fostering closer economic cooperation.
- **Renewable Energy:** Energy sources that are naturally replenished, such as solar, wind, and hydropower, which are considered environmentally sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels.
- **Resource Depletion:** The consumption of natural resources faster than they can be replenished, often leading to scarcity and environmental degradation.
- **Sanctions:** Economic penalties or restrictions imposed by one country or a group of countries on another, typically to influence political or economic behavior. Sanctions may limit trade, financial transactions, or access to resources.
- **Stimulus:** Government spending or financial measures designed to stimulate economic growth, often used during periods of economic recession to boost demand and employment.
- **Subsidies:** Financial assistance provided by governments to domestic industries, aimed at reducing production costs and making them more competitive in the global market. Subsidies are often used as part of protectionist policies.
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** 17 global goals established by the United Nations in 2015, focused on achieving a better and more sustainable future for all by addressing poverty, inequality, environmental sustainability, and other global challenges by the year 2030.
- **Tariffs:** Taxes or duties imposed on imported goods, used by governments to protect domestic industries from foreign competition by making imports more expensive.

9.13: Additional Readings

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9.14: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 9

1. What is International Political Economy (IPE)?
2. Describe the basic tenets of Mercantilism, Economic Liberalism, and Marxism.
3. Define what is meant by globalization and discuss its main challenges.
4. How does trade impact diplomacy?
5. What are regional trade agreements? Describe NAFTA, the EU, and ASEAN.
6. What is the role of the IMF and World Bank?
7. How has globalization impacted the environment?

10: HUMAN RIGHTS

Introduction

Human rights form the bedrock of international relations by providing a framework that transcends borders, seeking to uphold dignity, equality, and justice for every individual. The principles behind human rights have evolved significantly, shaping norms that address complex global issues such as security, poverty, and humanitarian intervention. In this chapter, we will explore the foundational aspects of human rights, the role of key international institutions, the impact of treaties and legal mechanisms, and the challenges of enforcement. Additionally, we will discuss the ongoing debate surrounding universal vs. culturally relative human rights, and examine the role of international aid in promoting human rights.

Learning Objectives

- Introduce human rights as a concept.
- Examine the UDHR and its impact on human rights.
- Survey the institutions created to protect and defend human rights.
- Discuss key human rights concepts and issues.
- Assess efforts to enforce human rights.

10.1: Foundations

10.2: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

10.3: International Institutions Protecting Human Rights

10.4: Key Human Rights Concepts and Issues

10.5: Enforcement of Human Rights

10.6: International Aid and Human Rights

10.7: Conclusion

10.8: Deeper Dive- International Law

10.9: Glossary

10.10: Additional Readings

10.11: Discussion Questions

10.1: Foundations

Human Rights Foundations

The concept of human rights is deeply rooted in the idea that every individual, by virtue of being human, possesses certain inalienable rights. These rights are meant to protect individual dignity and prevent discrimination or abuse based on nationality, race, religion, or social standing. Throughout history, different cultures and societies have recognized various forms of rights, but the modern conception of universal human rights emerged post-World War II as a response to the atrocities of the war. This led to the establishment of the United Nations and the creation of documents that would set an international standard for human rights protection.

10.2: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Introduction to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, is one of the most influential documents in the history of international relations. While not legally binding, the UDHR represents a milestone in recognizing and affirming human rights globally. It lays out 30 articles detailing a wide range of rights, including the right to life, liberty, security, education, and freedom from discrimination. These articles have become the foundation for subsequent human rights treaties and national constitutions worldwide.

After witnessing the horrors of the Holocaust and other wartime atrocities, the global community recognized the need for a shared framework to prevent future human rights abuses. The UDHR was drafted by representatives from diverse cultural and legal backgrounds, reflecting a comprehensive effort to define human rights as a universal set of standards. The UDHR emphasizes equality and non-discrimination, stating that all individuals are entitled to the same rights and freedoms without distinction. It also asserts the indivisibility of rights, meaning civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights are interconnected and equally essential to human dignity. This holistic approach has influenced subsequent treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Many countries have incorporated UDHR principles into their own legal systems, and the document has inspired numerous international treaties, conventions, and resolutions. Its influence is seen in the drafting of the European Convention on Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, among others. The UDHR also serves as a moral guideline for states, with international organizations and civil society groups frequently referencing its principles in cases of human rights violations. Despite being non-binding, its moral authority and symbolic power make it a cornerstone of international human rights.

10.3: International Institutions Protecting Human Rights

Introduction to International Human Rights Institutions

Several international institutions play pivotal roles in promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. These institutions, primarily within the United Nations system, facilitate cooperation among states, offer platforms for negotiation and conflict resolution, and provide mechanisms for enforcing human rights laws.

Geneva Convention

The Geneva Conventions, established between 1864 and 1949, are foundational treaties in international humanitarian law aimed at protecting individuals who are not participating in hostilities, such as civilians, wounded soldiers, and prisoners of war. Comprised of four treaties and three additional protocols, the Geneva Conventions are legally binding on all United Nations member states and have been ratified by almost every country globally, making them some of the most universally accepted international laws.

The first convention was introduced to provide care for wounded soldiers, while later conventions expanded these protections to naval forces, prisoners of war, and civilians. The Fourth Geneva Convention, adopted in 1949 in response to the atrocities of World War II, specifically outlines the protections for civilians in occupied territories, prohibiting acts such as torture, inhumane treatment, and displacement of populations.

The Geneva Conventions have evolved to address the complexities of modern warfare through additional protocols, which set guidelines for the treatment of non-combatants in conflicts involving state and non-state actors. However, challenges persist in enforcing these conventions, particularly when powerful states or non-state actors fail to comply.

United Nations (UN)

The UN remains at the heart of international human rights efforts, with multiple organs addressing various aspects of human rights.

- General Assembly and Security Council: Serve as platforms for discussing and addressing human rights issues and, in some cases, authorizing interventions to prevent severe abuses.
- International Criminal Court (ICC): Established by the Rome Statute, the ICC prosecutes individuals accused of serious crimes, such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Its creation marked a significant step toward holding individuals accountable on an international scale.
- Human Rights Council (UNHRC): Monitors and addresses human rights issues across the globe, implementing mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review to assess and improve human rights practices in all member states.

Regional Human Rights Bodies

Beyond the UN, regional organizations enforce human rights within specific geographic areas, often with tailored approaches to address regional issues.

- European Court of Human Rights (ECHR): Enforces the European Convention on Human Rights, setting precedents that influence regional and national human rights standards.
- Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights: Address human rights violations in the Americas and Africa, respectively, applying regional legal frameworks to protect and promote rights within these regions.

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10.4: Key Human Rights Concepts and Issues

State Sovereignty vs. Human Rights Obligations

Traditional international relations theory places a strong emphasis on state sovereignty, allowing states to govern without external interference. However, when severe human rights abuses occur, the international community often faces the ethical question of whether to intervene. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine emerged in response, asserting that states have a duty to protect their citizens from atrocities and, if they fail, the international community has a mandate to intervene.

Universalism vs. Cultural Relativism

The UDHR espouses the universality of human rights, arguing that these rights apply to all individuals, regardless of cultural context. However, critics argue that some human rights reflect Western ideals and may not align with certain cultural practices or values. This debate is central to human rights discussions, as proponents of cultural relativism argue for context-based interpretations of rights, while universalists insist on the inalienable nature of human rights.

Global Justice and Human Rights

Global justice theories contend that human rights should address not only civil and political freedoms but also structural inequalities. Scholars like Thomas Pogge argue that global inequalities perpetuate poverty, and human rights frameworks should be expanded to address economic injustice. By addressing these disparities, international relations can foster a fairer and more just global society.

10.5: Enforcement of Human Rights

Challenges to Enforcement

The primary challenges in international human rights is the lack of centralized enforcement mechanisms, limitations of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and selective enforcement. Unlike domestic law, international law relies heavily on state cooperation and consent, making enforcement inconsistent. The ICC prosecutes individuals for crimes like genocide and war crimes, but its reach is limited to countries that have ratified the Rome Statute. Major powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia, have not ratified the Statute, limiting the court's jurisdiction. Consequently, enforcement often depends on the political will of individual states. Political considerations frequently influence enforcement. Powerful states may evade scrutiny, while weaker or less politically connected nations face harsher consequences. For instance, despite widespread documentation of abuses in Myanmar against the Rohingya people, international intervention has been limited, highlighting the inconsistency in enforcing human rights standards.

10.6: International Aid and Human Rights

Introduction to International Aid and Human Rights

Aid is a critical tool in advancing human rights, particularly in supporting economic, social, and cultural rights by addressing issues like poverty, education, and healthcare. However, aid programs are complex, and their impact on human rights varies widely based on implementation and oversight. Bilateral aid is direct assistance from one country to another, which may include humanitarian aid, military aid, or development funding. Bilateral aid often comes with conditions, which can both help and hinder the recipient country. Multilateral aid is distributed through international organizations, such as the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund (IMF), allowing for coordinated responses to global challenges, such as health crises and extreme poverty.

Aid can be instrumental in lifting communities out of poverty, enhancing healthcare, and promoting human rights. However, conditionalities imposed by organizations like the IMF or World Bank may sometimes undermine local priorities. Requirements for structural adjustments, such as privatizing public services, can have mixed results, sometimes exacerbating inequalities or reducing access to essential resources. Aid effectiveness is often tied to proper planning and understanding of local needs. For instance, official development assistance (ODA) has had positive outcomes in areas like primary education and healthcare, particularly in regions where local infrastructure supports aid distribution. However, cases where aid is mismanaged or diverted for political purposes underscore the importance of transparency and accountability in aid programs.

10.7: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

Human rights continue to shape the landscape of international relations, reflecting a global commitment to uphold dignity and justice. Although enforcement remains inconsistent, the principles enshrined in the UDHR and other international treaties set a standard that transcends borders and cultures. As human rights issues evolve, so too must the frameworks and mechanisms through which they are upheld, with a particular focus on addressing global inequalities and supporting sustainable development. The most important framework for human rights is international law, to which we now turn.

10.8: Deeper Dive- International Law

Traisbach's "International Law"

International law is an important area to understand and much of it is theoretical or historical in nature – building on themes explored in the previous chapters. You have seen in the preceding chapter that some of the discussed theories regard ‘norms’ as a regulatory force in international relations, although the theories differ in their understanding of the relevance and function of these norms. This chapter takes up this notion and introduces you to the role of international legal norms as a particular means for the social regulation of international affairs.

Imagine a small settlement with a number of properties on each of which stands one house in which lives one family. This settlement has no common government, parliament, court system or police force. The internal affairs of each family as much as the borders of each property are respected as inviolable. The families have predominantly bilateral relations with each other and engage in commercial exchanges of goods and services. It is commonly accepted that if the head of a family dies, the established promises to other families and agreed exchanges are respected by the heirs. When children decide to delineate a new property or when a new family from elsewhere wants to settle in, the other families must agree first and recognise this new property. When disputes between families arise, they may result in violence, especially if someone challenges an established border or intervenes with a family's interests. It is commonly accepted that one may have recourse to force to defend one's interest in family and property. Other families do not intervene in these disputes as long as their interests are not affected or they have formed a special alliance with another family.

Ask yourself now whether you would call this settlement a ‘legal system’? Would you even speak of ‘laws’? Perhaps intuitively you would say no. Yet, consider for a moment which kind of rules and principles must exist even in such a setting. How does any form of regulation work? Why does it work? If you delve a little on these questions, you will encounter some of the foundational legal institutions that exist in most legal systems. The concept of property, title, territory and border are there; a principle of autonomy and supreme authority seems to apply to the families; and the institution of contract certainly exists. You will also detect rules of some sort in the form of established customs and you might even identify a principle that says that ‘agreements need to be kept’. Lawyers make use of the Latin phrase ‘*pacta sunt servanda*’ to express this basic principle. Thus, even in such a rudimentary setting, some customary rules and principles exist even if they are not called ‘law’ or written down in any form.

You will also note that some characteristics of what you may intuitively regard as essential to a legal order are missing: There is no authority ‘above’ the families which makes laws for all, adjudicates conflicts or enforces laws and judgements. There is no government, parliament, court or police system. The rules and principles seem to stem from established practices motivated by the functional needs of cohabitation, pragmatism or mere common sense. Whatever rules exist in this settlement, their validity and effectiveness are routed exclusively in the will of the families and their members.

This settlement resembles many peculiarities of the international legal order. In fact, the settlement resembles a certain depiction of the international legal order that most international lawyers today would call outdated, even though it is precisely this depiction of a primitive legal order that haunts international law even today. If you translate the situation of the settlement to the international plane and substitute the families with states, you will get a picture of international law characterised by states as the principal actors. In this depiction, states hold the supreme and exclusive authority over their polities and follow predominantly customary and contractual rules in the relations between them but have no world government above them.

The principle of sovereignty expressed this supreme and exclusive authority of states over their territory, and it confirmed the equal status of all states. It developed its current meaning through the writings of legal and political philosophers between the sixteenth and eighteenth century. Sovereignty continues to be the foundational pillar of the international legal order. For many decades this foundational pillar of international law read: sovereign states are the masters of international law with no world government above them. This meant that the validity of any legal rule depended on the will of states or, conversely, that states are only bound by authoritative legal precepts (norms) that they have consented to. In a famous judgement in the *Lotus* case, the Permanent Court of International Justice in The Hague – the principal judicial organ of the League of Nations, the predecessors to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of the United Nations (UN) – stated in 1927 (The Case of the S.S. ‘*Lotus*’, judgement of the Permanent Court of International Justice, 7 September 1927, 18): “International law governs relations between independent States. The rules of law binding upon States therefore emanate from their own free will as expressed in conventions or by usages generally accepted as expressing principles of law and established in order to regulate the relations between these co-existing independent communities or with a view to the achievement of common aims. Restrictions upon the independence of States

cannot therefore be presumed."

What law is international law?

It is this depiction of international law that often culminated in the question of whether international law was really law. How could international legal norms be effective if their validity depended on the will of states, the very subjects international law should govern? This doubt in the validity and effectiveness of international law ultimately led to a rupture between the two disciplines of international law and international relations theory after the Second World War. Two scholars, Edward Hallett Carr and Hans Morgenthau, suggested around this time that international law was particularly inept for understanding the behaviour of nations. They were disappointed by what they identified as an idealistic belief in international law which, after all, had not prevented – for the second time – a world war. They proposed instead a more ‘realistic’ assessment of international relations based on power and interest. The founding realist school of international relations theory thus questioned the effectiveness and relevance of international law as a decisive influencing factor for the behaviour of states and for the assurance of international peace and security.

Much has changed since then. The international legal order has diversified in every possible way. There are countless bilateral and multilateral contracts between states (called treaties or conventions in international law), and more than 5,000 intergovernmental organisations and their different organs engage in the regulation and administration of nearly all aspects of international life.

International legal norms pervade global affairs. Every time you travel internationally, send an email, or update your social media profiles, there are not only domestic but supranational legal norms at play, including regional norms as in the European Union. Be it border control, diplomatic and consular relations between countries, the determination of flight and navigation routes, internet regulation, privacy, the use of postal and telecommunication services, industrial standards or cross-border environmental hazards – international law permeates these areas as much as the better-known fields of the protection of human rights, humanitarian interventions and the fight against transnational terrorism.

It is important to understand, then, that the question of whether and how international law matters depends not least on one's conceptual outlook on international life. This chapter introduces you foremost to the (traditional ‘occidental’ or ‘Western’) normative understanding of international law in order to show you how international lawyers think and how they use international law. This implies a focus on valid legal rules that authoritatively regulate international life. Yet the understanding of international law as a system of legal norms is not the only possible approach, nor is it the solely valid one. In fact, there are numerous other approaches that complement the normative outlook on global law (Walker 2014). It is also important that the occidental depiction of international law is not the only one existing in the world. Scholars from outside the West have shown, for example, how the dominant view of international law neglects important and often earlier contributions to international law by other cultures. Asian, African and Latin American countries should form part of our understanding of international law. For example, international treaties existed already in Africa and Asia over three thousand years ago. Islamic legal thought, present in Persia, India, South Asia and Europe, also had legal regulations of how to conduct hostilities at least since the seventh century. There is not one single conception of international law or international politics.

By focusing on the normative understanding of international law, the chapter takes a modest approach and steers a middle ground. There are also conceptualisations that portray international law as a cosmopolitan order securing solidarity and peace in a ‘post-Westphalian’ world in which states have largely lost their status as sole sovereigns. On the other hand, there are theories that continue to question the social effectiveness and relevance of international legal norms to shape the behaviour of international actors. In addition, one can also analyse international law through empirical research that uses collected data about the social behaviour of actors as it is done, for example, to scrutinise the effectiveness of human rights norms. Yet, a purely empirical analysis has difficulty in conveying the idiosyncrasy of normative thinking and argumentation in international law. Even if collected data shows instances of non-compliance with human rights norms, it would be wrong to draw conclusions from this about the binding character or range of social effects of these norms.

International lawyers as a particular group of professionals learn techniques to determine which legal norms exist and which are applicable to the relevant actors in a certain situation. Lawyers speak of the sources and subjects of law. They learn how to apply these norms using specific techniques, such as interpretation or the balancing of conflicting rights. These professional techniques are not value-neutral or objective but involve subjective choices and politics. An approximation to objectivity and ideals of justice is achieved only through specific procedures that need to be followed, recognised modes of argumentation and particular processes of decision-making. In a nutshell, international law consists of certain conventions on argumentation and modes of conflict resolution that some regard as a craft, others as an art. Most likely it is both.

The contents of international law

One distinguishes broadly between domestic, regional and (public and private) international law. Domestic law stems from domestic lawmakers and regulates the life of the citizens of a particular state. Regional law, such as European Union law or the law of regional human rights mechanisms, stems from regional intergovernmental institutions and addresses the governments and individuals of a particular geographical region or legal regime. Public international law is the subject of this chapter and addresses – in most general terms – relations involving states, intergovernmental organisations and non-state actors, which include today individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private corporations. Private international law concerns conflicts of laws that may arise in cases where the domestic laws of different states could apply, for example in cases of cross-border e-commerce, marriages or liabilities.

Within public international law, a distinction is traditionally drawn between the law of peace and the law of war (humanitarian law). The law of peace regulates peaceful relations and includes such subject matters as international treaty law, the law of diplomatic and consular relations, international organisation law, the law of state responsibility, the law of the sea, the environment and outer space or international economic law.

International humanitarian law (IHL) is the law of armed conflicts (*jus in bellum* – the law applicable in war) and regulates the conduct of international and non-international hostilities. In times of war, the use of force, including the killing of human beings, is not prohibited. The legal regulation of armed conflicts goes back to the mid-nineteenth century and comprises a large body of customary rules and a series of important conventions and additional protocols to these conventions adopted primarily in The Hague and Geneva. International humanitarian law regulates, among other things, the methods and means of warfare and the protection of certain categories of persons – for example, the sick and wounded, prisoners of war and civilians. More specific treaties prohibit the use of certain types of weapons (such as chemical or biological weapons, mines or cluster munitions) or the protection of cultural property during armed conflict. Much of the development and codification of this body of law is the merit of the International Committee of the Red Cross, founded in 1863 by Henry Dunant, which is a private humanitarian institution based in Geneva and forms part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

At the transitional points between the law of peace and the law of armed conflict lies the legal regulation of the resort to force (*jus ad bellum* – the law to engage in war) which concerns the conditions that need to be met to use force legally as, for example, in instances of self-defence (Article 51, UN Charter). More recently, scholars also speak of the regulation of the transition to peace after the end of armed conflicts (*jus post-bellum* – the law after war) which includes questions over how to end armed conflicts, transitional justice and post-war reconstruction.

The strict distinction between the law of peace and the law of armed conflict has been somewhat blurred with the rise of international human rights law and international criminal law. Human rights law builds on and develops fundamental principles of humanitarian law for the protection of individuals. On the other hand, human rights have considerably influenced the refinement of humanitarian rules for the protection of combatants and civilians. International criminal law has seen a rapid development after the end of the Cold War first with the establishment of the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and then with the establishment of the International Criminal Court in 2002.

From ‘no world government’ to global governance

Consider now what it meant to establish, for example, an international legal prohibition of torture. Torture was a common and legal method of interrogation before the seventeenth century. A legal prohibition of torture would mean that governments are obliged by international law not to allow their officials to use torture. How did an international legal norm prohibiting torture develop? What were its effects?

Subjects: Who makes international law and to whom does it apply?

You have seen already that traditionally only states (for historical reasons also the Holy See/Vatican and the Maltese Order) were subjects of international law and bearers of privileges and obligations. Privileges included sovereign status, immunities, jurisdiction or membership in international organisations, for example. Obligations towards other states arose from voluntary contracts, from the principle of non-intervention or from responsibilities for wrongful acts.

The status of a sovereign state implied full membership in the international society of states. It is a contentious issue in international law whether a territorial entity gains the legal status of a sovereign state depending only on a number of factual criteria (such as the existence of a population, territory, effective government and capacity to enter into international relations)

or whether this requires also a formal recognition by other states. Already the criteria of statehood are contentious, and in practice it is not always easy to determine whether all conditions are met. In addition, for political reasons states have sometimes recognised other states that did not fulfil one or more criteria of statehood, or they have not recognised states despite them fulfilling all criteria. After the break-up of the former state of Yugoslavia, for example, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008. Serbia has not formally recognised Kosovo as an independent sovereign state. Neither have a number of other states such as Russia, China and Spain, which all try to control movements for regional independence or autonomy in their own territory.

Coming back now to the example of the prohibition of torture, which options did individuals have under international law to seek redress for acts of torture? If a foreigner was tortured by officials of another state, the home state could complain to the latter. The individuals themselves, however, could do very little under international law, for individuals were not subjects of this body of law. Even worse, if a state tortured its own citizens, this was an internal matter in which other states could not intervene.

Sources: How is international law made?

The most important and most concrete sources of international law are bilateral and multilateral treaties. Multilateral treaties are usually prepared during long negotiations at diplomatic state conferences where a final treaty text is adopted and then opened for signature and ratification by states. When an agreed number of states have ratified the treaty, it enters into force and becomes binding on the member states.

Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice lists as sources of international law on which the court may rely in its decisions: treaties, customary international law, general principles of law that exist in most domestic legal systems (such as behaving in 'good faith') and, as a subsidiary means, also judicial decisions and scholarly writings.

Customary practices are even today still a common and highly contentious source of law. Customary law refers to the established practices of states that are supported by a subjective belief to be required by law. If a customary rule exists, it is binding on all states except where a state has persistently objected to this rule. You can imagine already that the deduction of legal rules from social practices and subjective beliefs poses many difficulties and bears many insecurities regarding proof and actual content. Also during diplomatic conferences that prepare a treaty text, many difficult compromises are brokered. To paraphrase a saying that is often attributed to Otto von Bismarck, laws are like sausages. It is better not to see them being made.

In the context of our example of the prohibition of torture, imagine the following scenario: state A has signed and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which contains a prohibition of torture in Article 7, and is also party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. This country fights terrorism and brings suspected terrorists to secret prisons in countries which are not party to any of the above conventions. In these prisons, the suspects endure intense interrogations which include sleep deprivation, waterboarding (causing the sensation of drowning) and other measures.

As an international lawyer faced with this case your starting point would be the aforementioned international treaties that contain a prohibition of torture. You would need to determine whether the interrogation measures amount to torture. Here, the codified definition in international treaties and the interpretation of this definition in previous cases can give you important guidance. You would also need to determine whether the particular state in question has ratified the pertinent treaty or treaties. In our example, the situation is complicated by the fact that both treaties limit the territorial applicability of the treaty to all individuals within a state's territory and subject to its jurisdiction. Hence one could argue that instances of torture on the territory of non-state parties do not fall within the ambit of the treaties. Also a counterargument is possible. One could make a case for the extraterritorial application of the treaty if the acts of torture on foreign soil were effectively controlled by a state that is a member to the treaty.

You would then proceed to see whether a customary rule exists that prohibits the use of torture. Even if the treaties prohibiting torture have not been ratified by a state, you could argue that the treaty has codified an already existing customary rule or, if a large majority of states has ratified the treaties, that this is evidence that a customary rule has been formed. In light of horrendous historical experiences, you may also argue that the prohibition of torture is of such fundamental importance that today no derogation from this rule is permitted. In other words, you would argue that the prohibition of torture is a peremptory rule of international law (*ius cogens* – peremptory law) that does not permit any exception.

You can see now how the early idea of state consent as a necessary requirement for an international rule still permeates these argumentations. The main difficulty often consists in establishing state consent or, at times, in constructing alternatives for it.

Global organisation: The United Nations era

The end of the Second World War and the end of the Cold War are probably the most significant historical watersheds in the development of recent public international law. The end of the Second World War in 1945 led to the establishment of the United Nations and the rapid development of several areas of international law, including human rights law, international criminal law and international economic law.

The United Nations is the most important global intergovernmental organisation with major offices in New York, Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna. It was established with the principal aim to ensure peace and security through international co-operation and collective measures. As of 2017, it has 193 member states. Article 2 of the UN Charter, the founding treaty of the United Nations, confirms as guiding principles the sovereign equality of the member states, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the prohibition of the use of force and the principle of non-intervention.

Delegates of all member states meet once a year during the General Assembly to discuss pertinent issues of world politics and vote on non-binding resolutions. The Security Council is the highest executive organ of the United Nations in which the representatives of ten selected member states and five states with permanent seats decide on issues of peace and security through binding resolutions, which may result in economic sanctions or even military actions. The 'permanent five' (the People's Republic of China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) hold the privilege of a veto right allowing them to prevent the adoption of resolutions of the Security Council on any substantial (as opposed to procedural) issues. Major reform initiatives of the composition or voting procedures of the Security Council have been unsuccessful so far. This taints the effectiveness and the democratic legitimacy of the Security Council and, especially during the Cold War, it severely constrained the Security Council as two of its key members (the United States and the Soviet Union) were engaged in an ideological conflict. Politically, however, the right to veto was a necessary concession to ensure the participation of the most powerful nations in a world organisation.

Numerous principal and subsidiary UN organs and specialised agencies engage in the application, enforcement and development of international law. This work comprises, for example, classical legal work in the International Law Commission and special committees of the General Assembly, practical work in the field and diplomatic efforts by Offices of High Commissioners and their staff, or actions taken by the Security Council. All of these bodies, and many more, promote and shape international law in various ways. In the International Law Commission, for example, a group of experts create reports and drafts on specific topics that are then submitted to a committee of the General Assembly and can provide an important basis for later treaty negotiations. The Offices of the High Commissioners for Human Rights and Refugees do important work in the field where their staff endeavour to uphold international law often in crisis situations. Their experiences influence also subsequent interpretations of international law, for example, regarding who qualifies as a refugee. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) fulfils a crucial function in disseminating knowledge about international law by promoting education and research on human rights, justice and the rule of law.

Community and governance: The changing structure of international law

The existence of a world organisation, the legal prohibition of the use of force, the establishment of a system of collective security and the protection of human rights have caused fundamental changes in the international legal order. International lawyers and politicians speak frequently of the 'international community' that co-operates to pursue community interests which cannot be achieved by single states alone. These community interests may range from environmental challenges and cultural heritage to issues of human security.

How much the meaning of sovereignty has changed, one can see, for example, in the principle of a shared 'responsibility to protect' (R2P). According to this principle, states have an obligation to prevent gross human rights violations not only at home but also abroad, if necessary through forceful United Nations measures. The protection of the individual from severe atrocities has thus become a matter of national, regional and international concern. This means that states can no longer claim that gross human rights violations are internal matters and that they are protected by their sovereignty.

Today there are countless actors that engage in the making, interpretation, use and enforcement of international norms. States still are the major international actors and the principal makers and addressees of international norms. Yet the bureaucracies of intergovernmental organisations and their organs, numerous international, regional and domestic courts and tribunals, non-governmental organisations and even groups or single persons (so-called 'norm entrepreneurs') engage in the pronouncement, interpretation and dissemination of international legal norms, standards and other types of 'soft law'. And, they often do this without, or even against, the will of states. For example, a NATO-led intervention in Kosovo in 1999 was executed without the authorisation of the UN Security Council. NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is a collective security organisation,

effectively a military alliance, of Western states. It was originally created to help contain the spread of communism in Europe during the Cold War but has endured in the years since. Its actions in Kosovo contributed to the establishment of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty which was a private expert group under the auspices of the Canadian Government to respond to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's challenge on how to respond to large-scale violations of human rights and humanitarian law. The commission produced a report on 'The Responsibility to Protect' to which both the UN Security Council and the General Assembly have repeatedly referred to and which is used as an argumentative tool by civil society actors, including many non-governmental organisations. You can thus see how a private initiative has transformed into public normative authority.

This multitude of norms, legal regimes, actors and normative processes is reflected in more recent approaches to international law that focus more on pluralistic governance processes than on a unified legal system, and more on informal law-making than on formal sources.

The functioning of international law

In order to understand how different actors make normative claims and how they use international law, the aforementioned broader perspectives offer valuable insights. The emergence of a norm like the prohibition of torture and its influence start long before such a norm is codified in an international treaty. Political scientists and legal scholars have described a normative 'life cycle' that relies on a (transnational) social process which is characterised by an initial norm emergence, followed by early adoption of this new norm, spreading of this acceptance and ultimately by widespread internalisation of the norm and compliance with it.

For the first stage of norm emergence, the influence of so-called 'norm-entrepreneurs' (such as private individuals, lobbying groups, non-governmental organisations) is essential. Through a combination of means (e.g. framing of issues, campaigning, empathy appeal, persuasion, shaming, claiming, declaring, etc.) and on different organisational platforms, the norm-entrepreneurs try to enunciate norms and persuade governments to embrace them. In the case of torture, this meant that even literary novels and political pamphlets contributed to a change in social perception and an increase of empathy with victims which in turn led to the social unacceptability of torture.

Once a 'critical mass' of actors have adopted a new norm prohibiting torture or of a responsibility to protect, a threshold or tipping point is reached. At this second stage, the norm starts to spread through international society. Here an active process of transnational – domestic, regional and international – socialisation takes place which, primarily, states, international organisations and networks of norm entrepreneurs carry forward. Those state and non-state actors that have endorsed the norm engage in a process of redefining what qualifies as appropriate behaviour within international society. Social movement theory, which studies mobilisations in society to make collective claims about social changes, provides valuable insights on the conditions and effects of this process.

A third phase of internalisation or obedience is reached when norms 'achieve a "taken-for-granted" quality that makes conformance with the norm almost automatic' (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 904). If this process succeeds, norms such as the prohibition of torture become truly transnational in the course of this process. They exert normative force domestically through constitutional guarantees and through the work of civil society groups. In addition, the norms are invoked in regional and in international human rights fora such as regional and international courts or human rights bodies. Thus, these norms acquire a transnational character through interactions between a variety of actors – both state and non-state – across issues areas and across historic public/private and domestic/international dichotomies (Koh 1997, 2612).

This, however, does not mean that international law is a guarantor for a just global order. Much rests on the will and interests of the actors involved. International law itself cannot solve injustices and cannot manufacture solutions. Ultimately, many of the politically charged issues simply reflect in the language of international law. For example, we have seen already that international law prohibits the use of force by states in peace times except when the forceful measures have been authorised by the UN Security Council or when a state acts in self-defence (Article 51, UN Charter). In this scenario, not only politicians but also international lawyers will argue in legal terms whether the use of force against an (allegedly) imminent terrorist attack that has not yet occurred can be justified as a form of 'pre-emptive' self-defence. Similarly, since it is not illegal to kill enemy combatants during an armed conflict, international lawyers will exchange legal arguments about whether terrorists qualify as combatants and whether the killing of terrorist suspects in a foreign country is permissible under international law because of a continuing global war on terror that amounts to a state of armed conflict. Finally, also in the ambit of our example on the prohibition of torture, lawyers will argue about whether the situation of a hidden ticking bomb might exceptionally permit torturing the apprehended attacker if this could save innocent lives.

This is not to say, however, that international law is inherently indeterminate or arbitrary. The normative force of international law lies in the creation of new argumentative needs, in the possibility to challenge established positions, in the specific required modes of argumentation, in the institutionalised fora for conflict resolution and in the justificatory potential that rests in law.

Conclusion

Although questions about the relevance and effectiveness of international law persist, especially when powerful nations use their political power to 'bend' international law, today hardly anyone declares international law as irrelevant. Accordingly, the discussion has shifted from 'whether international law is really law' to 'how do international norms matter'. Also the divide between international law and IR theory has been closing for some time now. Liberal approaches to IR acknowledge that norms have an important role to play for the shaping of state preferences and in international co-operation to attain common aims by setting common normative frameworks. The English school argues for an international society in which states through interaction naturally create rules and institutions, as exemplified in the example of the families at the beginning of this chapter. The constructivist school focuses on social processes, including legal norms that shape the self-understanding, role, identity and behaviour of actors. Social movement theory analyses the creation and effects of group organisation in civil society and how campaigning, for example for human rights, gains social force and translates into political results.

International lawyers, on the other hand, have been opening up towards empirical, sociological and political approaches to understand how norms develop and how actors exert normative authority. This goes beyond understanding international law exclusively as a coherent legal system with recognised sources of law and specific techniques of legal practice. International lawyers increasingly adopt a more pluralistic and holistic outlook and an understanding of international law as a social process. This social process results in normative regulations that function as standards of conduct to guide and evaluate the behaviour of international actors. That the individual has acquired such a prominent role in international law as a central subject beyond state confines is truly remarkable. Today, each individual has rights that permeate the international and that are fundamentally embedded in an – albeit imperfect – global law which in turn permeates each of our lives. This law is not static but in a constant process of development. It requires to be made effective, challenged, defended and reformulated in order to fulfil its emancipatory potential.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe how Traisbach's example of a "small settlement" resembles the international legal order.
2. Describe the fissure between IR theory (in particular, Realism) and the discipline of international law following WWII.
3. How has the international legal order diversified since WWII?
4. What does it mean to say that International Law (IL) consists of conventions on argumentation and modes of conflict resolution and is both a craft and an art?
5. What are the types of IL? Describe Public International Law (PIL) and distinguish it from other types.
6. Focusing on PIL, distinguish between the Law of Peace, the Law of War, and the Law to Engage in War.
7. What does Traisbach mean when he writes that the UN, legal prohibition on the use of force, the system of collective security, and the protection of human rights have caused fundamental changes in the international legal order? How does this depend on changes to the meaning of sovereignty as traditionally understood?
8. Describe the first, second, and third stages of the normative "life cycle."
9. Traisbach maintains IL is not a guarantor of a just global order; much depends on the will and interests of the actors involved. IL cannot solve injustices and manufacture solutions. That said, he argues IL is not inherently indeterminate or arbitrary. Explain what he means when he writes: "The normative force of IL lies in the creation of new argumentative needs, in the possibility to establish positions, in the specific required modes of argumentation, in the institutionalized fora for conflict resolution and in the justificatory potential that rests in law."
10. Traisbach concludes that hardly anyone declares IL as irrelevant; that debate has shifted from whether IL is law to the question of how international norms matter. Explain what he means by this conclusion.

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Key Terms and Definitions

- **Civilians:** Non-combatant individuals who are protected under international law from being targeted in armed conflicts.
- **Conditionalities:** Requirements imposed on a country receiving aid, often by international organizations, which may mandate policy changes or reforms.
- **Cultural Relativism:** The belief that human rights and values should be interpreted within the context of a specific culture, rather than universally applied.
- **Culture:** The collective customs, social behaviors, beliefs, and practices of a particular society or group.
- **Discrimination:** Unjust or prejudicial treatment of individuals based on characteristics like race, gender, religion, or nationality.
- **Education:** The process of facilitating learning, often viewed as a fundamental right that promotes individual empowerment and development.
- **Equality:** The principle that all individuals deserve the same rights and opportunities, without discrimination or bias.
- **General Assembly:** A key UN body comprising all member states, responsible for policy discussion, international cooperation, and addressing global issues, including human rights.
- **Human Rights Council (UNHRC):** A United Nations body responsible for promoting and protecting human rights globally, often through resolutions and reviews of member states.
- **Inalienable Rights:** Fundamental rights that every individual inherently possesses, which cannot be taken away or denied.
- **Indivisibility of Rights:** The concept that human rights are interconnected and must be treated equally, as the enjoyment of one right often depends on others.
- **Individual Dignity:** The inherent worth and respect owed to every individual, forming the basis for all human rights.
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):** A treaty committing its parties to uphold civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech and the right to a fair trial.
- **International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR):** A treaty focused on protecting economic, social, and cultural rights, including rights to work, health, and education.
- **Liberty:** The state of being free within society, with rights protected from arbitrary restrictions and abuses.
- **Life:** The inherent right of every individual to exist, protected by human rights frameworks against unlawful deprivation.
- **Official Development Assistance (ODA):** Financial aid provided by developed countries to support economic, social, and humanitarian development in lower-income nations.
- **Prisoners of War:** Members of armed forces captured during conflict, protected under the Geneva Conventions from mistreatment and entitled to humane treatment.
- **Security:** Protection from threats to personal safety, often regarded as a fundamental human right within the context of human rights law.
- **Security Council:** A principal organ of the United Nations responsible for maintaining international peace and security, with the authority to take enforcement action.
- **State Cooperation and Consent:** A principle in international law whereby states agree voluntarily to abide by treaties and norms, crucial for the enforcement of human rights.
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):** A foundational document adopted by the UN in 1948, outlining the basic rights and freedoms entitled to all people worldwide.
- **Universalism:** The belief that human rights apply universally, transcending cultural, religious, and national differences to protect all individuals globally.

10.10: Additional Readings

Scholarly Resources

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10.11: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 10

1. What is the significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)?
2. What are the principle institutions that make up the international human rights regime?
3. Describe how state sovereignty, cultural relativism, and global justice issues inform human rights.
4. What are the challenges associated with enforcing human rights?
5. What are the controversies associated with aid and human rights?

11: THE ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

The environment plays a central role in international relations, where complex challenges like climate change, pollution, and resource scarcity demand cooperation across borders. This chapter explores the key environmental issues in international relations, including public goods, collective action problems, and the role of international agreements and theories like Green Theory. Through these concepts, we examine how global governance structures attempt to address environmental challenges that transcend national borders.

Learning Objectives

- Assess the broad range of impacts posed by environmental issues.
- Evaluate collective action problems associated with addressing environmental issues.
- Introduce green theory, political ecology, and sustainable development.
- Describe approaches to climate change and responsibility.
- Explore the evolution and challenges facing global environmental governance.

11.1: International Environmental Issues

11.2: Public Goods and the Collective Action Problem

11.3: Tragedy of the Commons and Common Pool Resources

11.4: Key Theories in Environmental Politics

11.5: Approaches to Addressing Climate Change

11.6: Principles of Payment Responsibility

11.7: Global Environmental Governance and Major Agreements

11.8: Challenges in Environmental Policy and Cooperation

11.9: Conclusion

11.10: Deeper Dive- The Environment

11.11: Glossary

11.12: Additional Readings

11.13: Discussion Questions

11.1: International Environmental Issues

Key Environmental Issues

Environmental issues impact international relations in complex ways, driving both cooperation and conflict, across a number of issue areas.

Carbon Emissions

Carbon emissions are a primary driver of climate change, largely produced by industrialized countries through fossil fuel consumption. These emissions affect global temperatures, weather patterns, and ocean acidity, impacting all nations. However, disagreements arise as developed countries—historically responsible for the largest share of emissions—face pressure to reduce their outputs, while developing nations seek leeway to grow economically.

Resource Scarcity and Access

Natural resources like water, minerals, and fossil fuels are essential for economic stability, but resource scarcity often fuels tensions. For instance, water scarcity in regions such as the Middle East has led to disputes over transboundary rivers and water rights, sometimes intensifying regional conflicts. Access to resources like rare minerals also influences geopolitical strategies, as countries strive to secure materials critical for technology and defense, affecting alliances and trade policies.

Food Security, Pollution, and Health

Climate change threatens global food production and distribution, increasing risks of famine, malnutrition, and food scarcity, particularly affecting vulnerable regions. The impacts on agriculture due to changing weather patterns and extreme climate events can lead to decreased crop yields and heightened food insecurity globally. Pollution, particularly air and water contamination, has international consequences, as pollutants can cross borders and affect neighboring countries. Issues like industrial emissions, plastic pollution, and toxic waste disposal have led to disputes and calls for stricter international regulations. Health impacts related to pollution, such as respiratory illnesses, further strain relations, as affected countries demand accountability from major polluters.

Climate-Related Diseases

Rising temperatures and changing weather patterns due to carbon emissions have expanded habitats for disease-carrying insects, such as mosquitoes, which spread illnesses like malaria, dengue, and the Zika virus. These diseases, once confined to tropical regions, are now appearing in more temperate areas, placing new populations at risk. This shift in disease geography strains healthcare systems and increases public health costs, often in countries with limited resources to combat these diseases.

Biodiversity Loss

Biodiversity is essential for ecosystem health, yet habitat destruction, deforestation, and poaching are causing rapid species loss. Countries rich in biodiversity, often in the Global South, face pressure to preserve ecosystems while balancing economic development. International agreements, like the Convention on Biological Diversity, aim to protect biodiversity, but differing priorities between economically powerful nations and developing countries can complicate these efforts.

Agrobiodiversity, the variety of plants, animals, and microorganisms used in agriculture, is declining as modern farming practices increasingly favor monocultures—large-scale cultivation of a single crop—over diverse crop rotations, reducing genetic diversity and making ecosystems more vulnerable to pests, diseases, and climate change.

Ocean and Marine Conservation

Oceans are common global resources that support biodiversity and provide economic value through fishing and tourism.

Overfishing, plastic pollution, and coral reef degradation have become major concerns, affecting international relations among coastal nations and major fishing powers. Efforts like the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) seek to establish guidelines for maritime resource use, yet disagreements remain over exclusive economic zones and deep-sea mining rights.

These issues reveal the interconnectedness of environmental health and political stability, demonstrating that international relations must increasingly address ecological concerns to achieve sustainable cooperation and development.

11.2: Public Goods and the Collective Action Problem

The Collective Action Problem

Environmental public goods—resources like clean air and stable climate—are non-rivalrous and non-excludable, meaning everyone benefits from them, regardless of individual contribution. The preservation of these goods often encounters the collective action problem, where states have incentives to benefit from others' efforts without actively contributing. This "free-rider" behavior is particularly problematic in global issues like climate change, where the actions of a few major polluters can affect everyone. For instance, carbon emissions from large industrial nations impact the global climate, affecting states that may not contribute as heavily to emissions.

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11.3: Tragedy of the Commons and Common Pool Resources

Tragedy of the Commons

The concept of the tragedy of the commons was introduced by ecologist Garrett Hardin in his 1968 article, which describes how individual actions driven by self-interest can lead to the depletion of shared resources. Hardin illustrates this with the example of a common pasture shared by multiple herders, each incentivized to add more cattle to maximize personal gain. As each herder acts in their own interest, the pasture becomes overgrazed, eventually harming all herders by degrading the resource they depend on. This dilemma highlights the difficulty of managing shared resources when individual benefits come at a collective cost, making it a fundamental issue in environmental policy and international relations.

While Hardin's tragedy of the commons implies that shared resources are inevitably doomed to overuse, political scientist Elinor Ostrom challenged this view with her 1990 work, *Governing the Commons*. Ostrom argued that communities could effectively manage common resources through cooperative governance rather than government control or privatization. Based on extensive field research, she identified successful examples where local communities created rules and norms for resource management, demonstrating that people could self-organize to prevent resource depletion. Ostrom outlined design principles for effective management of common resources, including:

1. Clearly defined boundaries: Community members need to know who has access to the resource and understand its limits.
2. Collective decision-making: Resource users participate in setting and enforcing rules.
3. Monitoring and enforcement: Local monitors ensure compliance, deterring overuse through shared accountability.
4. Conflict-resolution mechanisms: Quick, low-cost avenues for resolving disputes among users prevent tensions from escalating.
5. Recognition of community authority: External authorities respect the community's self-established rules.

Ostrom's findings contradicted Hardin's assumption that individuals would inevitably act selfishly, suggesting instead that communities could manage resources sustainably. Her work offered a cooperative framework for addressing global environmental issues, showing that grassroots governance structures could complement international agreements in safeguarding the global commons.

11.4: Key Theories in Environmental Politics

Green Theory

Green Theory, Political Ecology, and Sustainable Development are major theories in environmental politics. Green Theory emphasizes ecocentrism, valuing ecosystems and nature for their intrinsic worth, not just their utility to humans (anthropocentrism). This approach challenges traditional political theories, which often prioritize human-centered goals. Green Theory views environmental issues as interconnected, urging solutions beyond state-centric models. It advocates for global solutions based on ecological boundaries rather than political borders, often promoting decentralized governance like bioregionalism, where ecological regions form the basis for political organization.

Political Ecology

Political Ecology examines the relationships between environmental issues and social inequalities, emphasizing how political and economic systems contribute to environmental degradation and disproportionately affect marginalized communities. It critiques the power structures and policies that lead to environmental injustices, advocating for equitable and sustainable management of resources that takes local and indigenous knowledge into account. Political ecology examines the environmental impacts of economic practices, critiquing the growth-dependent global economy for its unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. It proposes a shift towards ecological sustainability by adjusting consumption and production patterns to account for environmental limits. The moral responsibility to protect future generations from the severe consequences of climate change. Policies should consider the long-term impacts on future populations. Climate strategies should avoid short-term thinking and instead focus on sustainable solutions to prevent lasting damage to the environment and future human welfare.

Sustainable Development

Emerging from the Brundtland Report, sustainable development emphasizes meeting current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. This principle is often integrated into policies addressing environmental, social, and economic factors simultaneously. This theory is sometimes criticized for potentially enabling “greenwashing” and for difficulties balancing economic interests with true ecological sustainability.

11.5: Approaches to Addressing Climate Change

Mitigation, Adaptation, and Geo-Engineering

Mitigation refers to efforts to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions to stabilize atmospheric CO₂ levels. This is often viewed as essential for intergenerational justice, as it helps prevent severe climate impacts for future generations. Adaptation refers to actions aimed at adjusting infrastructure, agriculture, and other systems to reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change. This approach is vital for protecting communities currently affected and increasing resilience to future climate threats. Geo-engineering refers to technological interventions designed to alter Earth's climate, such as solar radiation management or carbon dioxide removal. Geo-engineering poses ethical concerns and risks that Moellendorf argues must be carefully weighed against its potential to reduce harm. Geo-engineering may complement mitigation and adaptation efforts, especially if emission targets are not met in time. That said, the potential risks of geo-engineering are many, including: unpredictable ecological impacts (geo-engineering can alter weather patterns, potentially harming ecosystems); moral hazard (geo-engineering may reduce incentives for emission reductions); equity concerns (certain regions or communities could be disproportionately affected); and governance and accountability (geo-engineering requires international cooperation and strict oversight to avoid misuse or unintended consequences).

11.6: Principles of Payment Responsibility

Various Principles

Darrel Moellendorf explores different principles that could guide which entities or nations should bear the costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation. Ability-to-pay principle suggests wealthier nations or groups should contribute more since they have the resources to do so. This is considered more equitable and feasible than alternatives. Polluter-pay-principle argues those who have historically contributed the most emissions (e.g., industrialized nations) should be primarily responsible for the costs. However, this can be complicated to enforce over time and across regions. Beneficiary-pays principle implies those who have benefited from activities causing climate change should bear the costs of addressing it. This is often harder to assess accurately, as it involves extensive historical analysis and economic valuation. Moellendorf ultimately favors the Ability-to-Pay Principle over the other two, as it offers a practical approach to achieving climate justice without necessitating extensive historical accountability.

11.7: Global Environmental Governance and Major Agreements

Environmental Governance and Agreements

Global environmental governance has evolved through international megaconferences and environmental agreements, setting frameworks and standards for cooperation on pressing ecological issues. These events and agreements illustrate the ongoing challenge of balancing environmental protection, economic growth, and state sovereignty, marking significant milestones in international environmental policy:

- 1972 Stockholm Conference: The first major international dialogue on environmental issues, leading to the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which has since been a central body in coordinating environmental action and policy.
- 1987 Brundtland Report: Introduced the concept of sustainable development, integrating economic, environmental, and social goals, with a focus on intergenerational equity—preserving resources for future generations.
- 1992 Earth Summit in Rio: This summit promoted sustainable development and established the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which laid the groundwork for future climate agreements.
- 1997 Kyoto Protocol: A legally binding commitment for industrialized countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Despite its pioneering approach, it faced limitations due to major countries like the United States not participating.
- 1998 Aarhus Convention: Focused on public access to environmental information and environmental justice, empowering citizens to hold states and corporations accountable for their environmental impact.
- 2015 Paris Agreement: Established more flexible, self-set targets (Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs) to limit global warming, marking a new phase in climate cooperation by involving both developed and developing nations. The agreement saw commitments from major polluters, including the U.S. and China, enhancing its impact and scope. In 2020, the US became the first nation in the world to formally withdraw from the Paris climate agreement.

These conferences and agreements collectively highlight the evolution of global environmental governance, from setting early principles to establishing legally binding frameworks. They demonstrate both the successes in global cooperation and the challenges, as implementation often relies on voluntary state compliance and faces resistance due to economic interests. Together, they reflect the growing recognition of environmental protection as essential to sustainable international relations.

11.8: Challenges in Environmental Policy and Cooperation

Challenges

There are a number of important challenges impacting environmental policy and cooperation including, state sovereignty and responsibility, short-termism, and power asymmetries, all of which call out for a centralized global environmental organization. Environmental issues require cross-border cooperation, which can conflict with state sovereignty. Many states hesitate to relinquish control over their environmental policies, even in the face of pressing global challenges. The Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement highlight this tension, where states negotiate commitments while trying to preserve their national interests. Political leaders and policymakers often favor short-term economic gains over long-term environmental benefits, a phenomenon known as discounting. The immediate costs of environmental action are weighed against future benefits, creating reluctance to enact policies that may not yield tangible results within electoral cycles. Environmental issues reveal asymmetries, as smaller countries are highly susceptible to climate impacts but wield little power to drive global change. Often excluded from major decision-making, these nations must endure policies decided by larger powers without equal input. This imbalance leaves vulnerable countries affected first, yet least able to influence solutions.

The Need for a Global Environmental Organization

Some scholars advocate for a centralized global environmental organization to enforce and monitor environmental agreements. Although the UNEP plays a role, it lacks the authority and resources to mandate compliance effectively. Proposals for a global environmental body suggest a more unified approach to address large-scale issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

11.9: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

Environmental issues are inherently international, as pollution, climate change, and resource depletion ignore political boundaries. Addressing these challenges requires balancing national interests with global responsibilities, guided by theories like Green Theory and practical efforts through international agreements. While the international community has made progress through conferences, treaties, and theoretical frameworks, the path to effective global environmental governance demands continued cooperation and innovation, prioritizing the environment as an integral part of international relations. We now turn to a deeper dive into global environmental challenges.

11.10: Deeper Dive- The Environment

Pacheco-Vega's "The Environment"

Today, our planet carries over seven billion people. Yet its capacity to provide for each one of these individuals is threatened by population growth, climate change, deforestation, collapse of fisheries, desertification, air pollution and scarcity of fresh water. The full extent of our shared global environmental problems goes far beyond the well-publicised challenge of global climate change (or global warming). In fact, one of the elements often forgotten is the complicated relationship between human beings and their environment. In the early years of the conversation around environmental protection, some argued that the planet's resources were there for our collective consumption. However, there are limits to growth and this raises a range of important issues for international relations. Our population quadrupled between 1900 and 2000. This growth, coupled with abrupt climate change events and further compounded by rapid industrialisation and fast urban expansion, have combined into a perfect storm of negative environmental processes that put pressure on the capacity of Planet Earth to sustain life. As students of IR, we ought to recognise that the environment is one of the areas where much work remains to be done, particularly because cooperative approaches to environmental protection have had a very mixed record despite the grave implications of failure.

The relationship between international relations and environmental problems

It is often hard to assess whether international cooperation efforts have had any real effect on society's wellbeing, the quality of our environment, or even the construction of long-term relationships between states. One form of evaluation takes place through the study of environmentally focused 'megaconferences'. These large-scale events bring together representatives of national governments, intergovernmental secretariats, non-governmental organisations, academics and industry actors to engage in conversations about the state of the environment. They usually focus on a particular issue at hand. What makes these megaconferences interesting is that their goal is to engage in productive collaborative efforts to reach agreement and consensus on specific strategies to protect the environment and solve global challenges.

Historically, the two environmental issues that have gained the most attention have been climate change and biodiversity. Both of these issues came up at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 – formally called the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Nevertheless, most scholars will recall the 1972 United Nations Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment as the first large-scale environmentally focused megaconference. The Stockholm Conference was also the starting point for the first global coordination mechanism for environmental protection, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This conference was also the first one where participants explicitly linked human health with environmental and ecosystem health in their discourses.

The second milestone in global environmental governance is the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987. This report outlined the need for a new model for development that brought into play the notion that we cannot simply use (and misuse) the resources we have at our disposal. The new model, coined sustainable development, became an enduring part of the global conversation about environmental protection. The Brundtland Report defines sustainable development as having three main components: economic, environmental and social – an idea that was then put forward for implementation at the Earth Summit.

The third milestone was the 1992 Earth Summit. A major outcome of this meeting was the recognition of two of the most important environmental issues – the loss of biodiversity and rapid climatic change – and the need for intergovernmental secretariats and agreements to respond to these twin challenges. The bulk of the world's states, 161, signed a declaration on the need for a model of global development that enabled future generations to live within their means but also facilitated current generations' livelihoods. The fact that so many states reached an agreement on the concept of sustainable development, and the need to operationalise it, became the key contribution of the Earth Summit. Activist involvement became the norm in international conferences on environmental issues starting with the Rio Summit. Non-governmental organisations were considered part of the negotiations from the very beginning and over 2,000 non-governmental representatives attended.

The fourth milestone was the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. The goal was to establish collaborative intergovernmental, cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral partnerships. In theory, this would strengthen the way in which environmental activists interact and partner with national governments. Different types of partnerships were elucidated and non-state actors were considered from the design stage up to implementation. However, following the summit there was a widespread perception that there had been very little progress on the implementation side, leading to a feeling of

megaconference fatigue. To remedy this, the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (also known as Rio+20) created mechanisms for follow-up of commitments to sustainable development. It also highlighted the relevance of specific targets for development and the need for transition towards broader-reaching sustainable development goals. Moreover, the outcome document of this conference defines specific regional initiatives towards the implementation of sustainable development.

The 2015 Paris Agreement represented consensus among a number of countries that something needed to be done to maintain the level of global warming below two degrees centigrade. The fact that an agreement was reached was groundbreaking for the global climate negotiations community. Prior negotiations were marked by disagreements and lack of consensus on a strategy to compel nations to reach internationally agreed targets in their carbon emissions. This is important as carbon dioxide, released primarily by burning fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas and coal for energy, is the main cause of global warming. Nevertheless, Paris showed that many countries were able to agree on specific goals, targets and policies needed to combat rapid and impactful global environmental change. The process it established is yet to be fully realised, but in the years to come the expectation is that states will comply.

Climate change isn't the only ecological issue facing our planet. But its role in catalysing global action to protect the environment cannot be overstated. One of the most neglected issues is water. While the earth is two-thirds covered by water, the proportion that is fresh (drinkable and useable for agriculture) is sometimes highly contested by neighbouring states and in short supply for growing populations. When added to the effects of climate change, access to water is an issue of real concern. While many other challenges remain in the areas of climate and environment, it is likely that a framework for global water governance will be a major issue on the agenda in the near future.

Common pool resource theory

With a brief history of megaconferences now complete, we can move on to discussing the substance of the debates on climate and the environment. The notion of public goods comes from the original definition of a good that is non-excludable and non-rivalrous. Think of it as something that anyone can access at any point in time without making it any less available for anyone else to consume. The best example of a public good is knowledge; in this case we can use the example of information that we find on the internet. All knowledge, once freed and put online for public consumption, is non-excludable and non-rivalrous in consumption. You cannot exclude anyone from consuming knowledge and learning, unless they do not have access to the means for knowledge transmission, which may be the case in some countries where specific websites are banned. You also experience non-rivalry in consumption. Air is another example of a public good. Under normal circumstances nobody can stop you from breathing air into your lungs, and the fact that you breathe air does not stop someone else from having the opportunity to enjoy it. This is the definition of a perfect public good: one that is always non-rivalrous in consumption and non-excludable in access.

Common pool resource theory derives from Garrett Hardin (1968), who said that if left to our own devices we would exhaust all the resources available for our consumption. Imagine if you were a shrimp fisher. You need to fish and sell your catch to sustain your family. Let's say that there are 10,000 shrimp in the small catchment that you fish in. But there are 99 other fishers in the sea at the same time as you. If everyone cooperated and consumed only $1/100^{\text{th}}$ of the total available shrimp, each would have 100 shrimp to sell. If at any point any fisher catches more than $1/100^{\text{th}}$, there will be other fishers negatively affected. Hardin used a similar metaphor to make the point that if resource consumers behave selfishly, they would exhaust the resources they were supposed to preserve. Hardin called this the tragedy of the commons. Closed bodies of water, plots of land and large-scale areas of forests are all common pool resources. They are rivalrous in consumption, but non-excludable.

One can summarise the theory of common pool resources by placing goods in four specific categories: private goods, common goods, club goods and public goods. This categorisation framework has two dimensions. The first dimension is excludability. If you can prevent someone from accessing a good, that good is excludable. The second dimension is rivalry in consumption. Goods that are depleted are rivalrous in consumption. If I consume an apple, you cannot consume that same apple because I have already eaten it. Private goods, such as food, clothing and other material objects, can be purchased and acquired because they are tradable. As a result, these goods are both rivalrous in consumption (if I buy a car, nobody else can buy that exact same car) and excludable (you cannot buy a car unless you have the money to purchase it).

Goods that are non-rivalrous in consumption and non-excludable are called public goods. These are the things that everybody can enjoy. Consuming them does not reduce the possibility of someone else having the same opportunity of consumption. Air is a public good. Everybody can breathe air without worrying that at some point they will not be able to breathe simply because somebody else is also breathing. Finally, common goods, which are also called common pool resources, are those goods that are non-excludable but rivalrous in consumption. Fish in a fishery, trees in a forest, water in an aquifer or a lake. All these natural resources are common goods and, therefore, common pool resources. What makes common pool resources so interesting is that the theory, developed by Elinor Ostrom (1990), argues that despite the fact that humans are supposed to be selfish, faced

with conditions of scarcity we are able to self-organise and govern our common pool resources (our ‘commons’) in a sustainable manner. One of the reasons why Ostrom’s work had such an impact was because her theory of cooperative approaches to resources governance contradicted Hardin’s tragedy of the commons model. Instead of being so selfish that they would want to fish all the shrimp (for example), Ostrom found that fishers would build a shared agreement to reduce their own consumption for the wellbeing of the collective. Obviously, this is an example on a relatively small scale. What remains to be seen is whether we can achieve global cooperation to protect our global commons. One way to think about this is through the lenses of global public goods, as discussed below.

The global environment as a global commons

Perhaps you would agree that a shared environment would be a resource community and individuals would work collaboratively to protect. But there is another view, which is that responsibility for care of the environment rests with governments. One way of thinking about this is to use the concept of the global environment as a global commons. After all, global environmental problems are by their very nature global. However, international cooperation is hard to achieve. As the example of the US shows, there are powerful countries that will avoid cooperation for various reasons. For many years the US refused to sign the international agreement on climate change, the Kyoto Protocol (the forerunner to the 2015 Paris agreement), thus blocking many international efforts to reduce global carbon emissions. There are several other examples that can be cited, but suffice it to say that a powerful country’s refusal to collaborate to solve a global issue is concerning. It is hard to make countries commit to specific conservation goals (in forest policy) or emission-reduction targets (in climate policy) or standards for pollution in rivers (in water policy) because each nation has its own national development objectives that may conflict with other countries’ goals, thus making it hard to find common ground for collaboration.

Given that cross-national collaboration is so difficult, we create international environmental agreements that build a framework to help these countries talk to each other and agree on specific targets for environmental protection. Some of the most popular international environmental agreements are specific to the area of climate change (like the Kyoto Protocol), but other, less well-known examples – such as the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters – are equally relevant. One of the biggest problems for human beings acting at the individual level on environmental issues is the lack of information. Countries that are signatories to the Aarhus Convention make an agreement to share data that will enable citizens of a country to understand the potential risks that they face with regard to chemicals’ processing and emissions. This information also helps environmental activists bring industries to account and ensure that they reduce their polluting emissions.

Global rights and domestic environmental politics and policy

The right to a healthy environment and the global commons are ideas that suggest that it is our shared duty to take care of our collective environment because everyone has a right to enjoy their environment and use some of its resources for their survival. It is possible to link human rights with global environmental regulation through the implementation of the international norm of a right to a healthy environment. This is a new avenue of research for scholars of international relations, and it is founded on the basis of a popular idea, or norm, that every individual on the planet has a right to a healthy environment. Despite states having different abilities and varying degrees of technical expertise to implement the norm, the number of countries with constitutional environmental rights has expanded radically (Gellers 2015). Eighty states now have such legislation in their constitutions, but we are still quite a long way away from having this norm as a fundamental human right.

There are also, of course, many other concerns that divert government focus from environmental issues. Increasing regulation on certain heavy-polluting industries, such as steel and coal, can have a negative effect on jobs. Setting ‘green’ taxes, either directly or through such things as energy tariffs, can also cause a burden on taxpayers and businesses. Thus, there has sometimes been a tendency to see environmental legislation as damaging to economic growth and prosperity. By extension it can also be unpopular in domestic settings, making legislation difficult to pass – or even propose in some cases. It is consequently encouraging to see so much domestic legislation gaining traction. The number of countries where the human right to a healthy environment is enacted constitutionally may help build collaborative transnational networks to protect the global commons. The starting point would be a shared understanding of the need to reduce human impact on national and global ecosystems. Sharing a paradigm that pushes the human right to a healthy environment may also induce national governments to actively seek participation in international environmental agreements. Nevertheless, it is important to find a way to coordinate these agreements, and this challenge raises the question of whether we need a global environmental organisation to make sure states comply.

The best situation for Planet Earth’s citizens are solutions that are made not just in each state, but internationally. And, most importantly, complied with. IR is often concerned with the phenomenon of states cheating on, or withdrawing from, agreements.

Perhaps nowhere is compliance more important for our long-term prosperity and security than in the areas of climate and environment.

Do we need a global environmental organisation?

Who is in charge of protecting our global environment? To answer this question, you may recall from previous sections that there is now a consensus regarding one specific tool that may help achieve the lofty goal of providing global public goods: international environmental agreements. These agreements, often produced at megaconferences, help protect our global commons by requiring nations to acknowledge and respect the human right to a healthy environment. However, the next big question is an equally important one – who is in charge of implementing these international environmental accords? Some have argued that in order to force countries to cooperate in the protection of our shared environment, we need a global intergovernmental secretariat. This would take the form of a far-reaching international institution whose sole purpose would be coordinating efforts to improve environmental quality.

For many years there was a collective belief that the United Nations Environment Programme had been tasked with the challenge of protecting our global network of ecosystems and shared resources. This may have been true in the early stages of its creation following the 1972 Stockholm Conference, but protecting our global environment has proved to be an impossible task for a small agency with a limited budget and no power to compel states to act in a particular way. The reality is that even though there is increasing interest in strengthening international cooperation across countries to protect the global environment, it is the number of institutions, agencies and programmes dealing with environmental issues at other levels that grows in size and complexity. Regrettably, the frequent mention of abrupt climate change events, increasing deforestation and growing levels of pollution in oceans, rivers and lakes makes it clear that we have yet to solve these complex global environmental problems. And while there is still no agreement as to whether the United Nations Environment Programme is the agency that should be tasked with protecting the global environment or whether we should create a new global environmental organisation (see Biermann 2000), we must ensure that we focus on collective solutions at the international level rather than state, regional or local level – we all share the earth.

To strike an optimistic note, we can find at least one instance of global environmental cooperation, the Paris Agreement of 2015. This was led by the chair of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat, Christiana Figueres, and is an example of what can be achieved in global cooperation for environmental protection by just one intergovernmental secretariat. The fact that the majority of the world's states were able to reach agreement on the specific tactics and strategies that every state needs to undertake in order to reach the stated goal of holding increases in the earth's temperature below two degrees centigrade is to be lauded. Even more important is that the agreement has secured the support of the world's two biggest state polluters, the US and China. The Secretariat is probably not the global environmental organisation we need right now, but it played a pivotal role at a crucial time.

The debate around whether or not we should have a global environmental organisation may never be settled. However, if we were to establish such a thing it would need full and complete cooperation from all states to stand any chance of success. The example of Paris, which built on the example of earlier megaconferences and movements, suggests that international collaboration to protect our environment is on the rise. This offers hope for the future despite rising tensions in some nations over the nature of climate agreements.

Conclusion

It is clear that we still have a lot of work to do with regard to our shared understanding of what constitutes strong, robust, effective and efficient global environmental governance. We need to better integrate regional and transnational initiatives with domestic policy strategies to tackle environmental problems. This means creating the conditions for a model of governing the environment that is flexible and cuts across different levels, from the local to the global. It is also clear that frameworks based on ideas of global public goods and global commons are very useful. However, at the same time they are daunting, since collective action on any scale is clearly an enormous challenge. Trying to find mechanisms, models and strategies to ensure cooperation across different levels of government, across a broad variety of issue areas and across a range of political and policy actors is a problematic and difficult process, as experience has shown. Today, the world's states have been able to find common ground in relation to certain goals for environmental protection, including the flagpole issues of global warming and climate change. The hope is that this trend continues so we can continue to live healthily and happily on Planet Earth.

Discussion Questions

1. Contrast Garrett Hardin's tragedy of the commons with Elinor Ostrom's theory of common pool resources. Considering that Ostrom's research often focused on small-scale communities, to what extent can her findings on cooperative self-organization be applied to solve global environmental problems where powerful states may have conflicting national development objectives?
2. Evaluate the impact of environmentally focused megaconferences from the 1972 Stockholm Conference to the 2015 Paris Agreement. Did the shift from the consensus-building goals of the 1992 Earth Summit to the perceived megaconference fatigue of the 2002 Johannesburg Summit represent a failure of international cooperation, or was it a necessary step toward the target-based approach seen in later agreements?
3. Discuss the tensions that arise when national governments attempt to balance the emerging international norm of a right to a healthy environment with domestic pressures such as job protection in heavy-polluting industries and the avoidance of green taxes. How might constitutional environmental rights help or hinder a state's participation in international environmental agreements?
4. Is the creation of a centralized Global Environmental Organization essential for ensuring state compliance with international accords? In your discussion, consider why the United Nations Environment Programme has historically struggled to fulfill this role and whether a more powerful intergovernmental secretariat is feasible given the complexities of domestic environmental politics.
5. While climate change is a primary focus of modern international relations, the sources identify fresh water scarcity as a major future concern. Why is water governance particularly difficult to manage under the framework of common pool resources, and how might the contestation of water resources between neighboring states impact future global stability?

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Key Terms and Definitions

- **Ability-to-Pay Principle:** A principle suggesting that wealthier nations or groups should contribute more to climate action, as they have greater financial resources.
- **Adaptation:** Adjusting infrastructure, agriculture, and other systems to reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change.
- **Agrobiodiversity:** The variety of plants, animals, and microorganisms used in agriculture; often reduced by monoculture farming, which limits genetic diversity.
- **Anthropocentrism:** The viewpoint that nature has value primarily for its utility to humans, often contrasted with ecocentrism.
- **Aarhus Convention:** A 1998 international treaty promoting public access to environmental information and empowering citizens to hold states and corporations accountable for environmental impact.
- **Biodiversity:** The diversity of plant and animal species within ecosystems, crucial for ecological health and resilience.
- **Beneficiary-Pays Principle:** The idea that those who benefit from actions that cause climate change should bear the costs of addressing its effects.
- **Brundtland Report:** A 1987 report that introduced the concept of sustainable development, advocating for economic growth that considers environmental and social equity.
- **Carbon Emissions:** Release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, largely from fossil fuels, which contributes significantly to climate change.
- **Climate Change:** Long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, mainly caused by human activities like burning fossil fuels and deforestation.
- **Collective Action Problem:** A situation in which individuals or states have incentives to benefit from others' efforts to solve a problem without contributing themselves.
- **Collective Decision-Making:** A process where multiple stakeholders or community members participate in setting and enforcing resource management rules.
- **Ecocentrism:** The belief that ecosystems and nature have intrinsic value beyond their usefulness to humans.
- **Environment:** The natural world, including air, water, and land, which provides essential resources and sustains life.
- **Free-rider:** An individual or state that benefits from collective efforts without contributing to them, often a problem in global climate initiatives.
- **Geo-engineering:** Technological interventions, such as solar radiation management or carbon dioxide removal, aimed at altering the Earth's climate.
- **Global Responsibility:** The concept that addressing environmental issues, like climate change, is a shared responsibility among all nations, especially given its global impacts.
- **Green Theory:** An environmental political theory that emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature and advocates for governance based on ecological rather than political boundaries.
- **Greenwashing:** The practice of presenting an organization's environmental actions as more substantial than they are, often for marketing purposes.
- **Governing the Commons:** A 1990 work by Elinor Ostrom that outlines how communities can manage shared resources sustainably through cooperative governance.
- **Holistic Environmentalism:** A perspective in Green Theory that sees environmental issues as interconnected with social, political, and economic factors, requiring global solutions.
- **Intergenerational Justice:** The ethical consideration that current climate policies should protect the rights and welfare of future generations.
- **Kyoto Protocol:** A 1997 international treaty committing industrialized nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, though it faced challenges in participation and enforcement.
- **Megaconferences:** Large international conferences, such as the Earth Summit, which address global environmental challenges and establish frameworks for cooperation.
- **Mitigation:** Efforts to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change.
- **Natural Resources:** Raw materials like water, minerals, and fossil fuels that are essential for economic stability and development.
- **Paris Agreement:** A 2015 international agreement aiming to limit global temperature rise by encouraging countries to set self-determined emissions reduction targets.
- **Political Ecology:** A theory that examines the relationships between environmental issues and social inequalities, focusing on how political and economic systems drive environmental degradation.
- **Polluter-Pays Principle:** A principle that holds those historically responsible for pollution accountable for the costs of mitigating its effects.
- **Public Goods:** Resources like clean air or stable climate that are accessible to all and cannot be easily restricted, yet are

often vulnerable to overuse.

- **Sustainable Development:** Development that meets current needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet theirs, balancing economic, social, and environmental goals.
- **Tragedy of the Commons:** A concept describing the overuse of shared resources, like fisheries or forests, due to individual incentives to maximize personal gain, leading to resource depletion.
- **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP):** Established at the 1972 Stockholm Conference, UNEP coordinates global environmental action and policy efforts.

11.12: Additional Readings

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11.13: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 11

1. Describe how environmental issues impact international relations in terms of carbon emissions, resources, food, health, diseases, biodiversity, and oceans.
2. How do collective action problems impact international efforts to address environmental issues, especially climate change?
3. Describe Ostrom's theory of cooperative governance and how it relates to Hardin's tragedy of the commons.
4. Define what is meant by green theory, political ecology, and sustainable development.
5. Describe mitigation, adaptation, and geo-engineering approaches to climate change.
6. Having reviewed the principles of payment responsibility, including ability to pay, polluters pay, and beneficiaries pay, who do you think should bear the costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation?
7. Describe the evolution of global environmental governance and major agreements.
8. How do state sovereignty, short-termism, and power asymmetries impact international environmental efforts?
9. Do you support the creation of a global environmental organization to enforce and monitor environmental agreements? Why or why not?

12: THE FUTURE OF WORLD POLITICS

Introduction

As the world transitions into the mid-21st century, the field of International Relations faces profound transformations. Challenges such as climate change, technological disruption, and shifting geopolitical power are converging, demanding new approaches to global governance. This chapter explores how states, non-state actors, and institutions must adapt to navigate these changes, focusing on pivotal themes that will define the future of IR.

Learning Objectives

- Analyze the transition from traditional multilateralism to emerging governance models, such as multipolarity, collaborative sovereignty, and mini-lateralism, while considering the inherent tension between state sovereignty and collective action.
- Evaluate the geopolitical and ethical implications of technological innovation, specifically focusing on how artificial intelligence, autonomous weapons, and cybersecurity threats redefine power dynamics between state and non-state actors.
- Examine the role of climate change as a driver of international instability, focusing on how resource scarcity, biodiversity loss, and "green geopolitics" necessitate new metrics for success beyond traditional GDP.
- Assess the current state of international norms by identifying which principles—such as human rights, digital privacy, and environmental protection—are gaining global acceptance versus those at risk of weakening due to shifting geopolitical priorities.
- Describe the future of economic interdependence including the shift toward selective cooperation, technological decoupling between major powers, and the development of more equitable and sustainable trade models.

12.1: Shifting Global Governance Models

12.2: Technological Innovations and Geopolitics

12.3: Climate Change and Sustainability

12.4: International Norms in Flux

12.5: The Future of Economic Interdependence

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12.1: Shifting Global Governance Models

Inadequate Global Governance Models

The frameworks that have governed international relations since the mid-20th century are increasingly inadequate. Traditional multilateralism, exemplified by institutions like the United Nations, struggles to address modern transnational challenges. Global issues such as climate change, pandemics, and digital security require collaborative approaches that transcend state-centric models. New governance models are emerging to address these gaps.

From Great Power Dominance to Multipolarity

The post-Cold War unipolar system is giving way to a more contested multipolar world. Middle powers and non-state actors play a larger role in shaping global agendas. A dynamic network of state and non-state actors—including NGOs, private corporations, and local governments—working collaboratively to solve global challenges.

Collaborative Sovereignty and Mini-Lateralism

Regional frameworks such as the European Union exemplify the benefits of pooling sovereignty to manage shared challenges like trade, migration, and environmental policy. Smaller coalitions of like-minded states and actors tackle specific issues, such as regional security or climate resilience, with greater efficiency. While these approaches bring promise, they also highlight the tension between state sovereignty and collective action—a balance that will shape the future of global governance.

12.2: Technological Innovations and Geopolitics

Technology and Geopolitics

Technological advancements are not only reshaping societies but also redefining global power dynamics. Artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and cyber capabilities are at the forefront of this transformation, offering significant opportunities while presenting profound risks. The way states and non-state actors manage these technologies will determine the trajectory of global stability.

Artificial Intelligence and Automation

AI-driven decision-making is revolutionizing industries, economies, and military strategy. Its application in governance and diplomacy has the potential to enhance efficiency, but it also introduces challenges. AI threatens to displace jobs in manufacturing, logistics, and customer service, requiring workforce adaptation and global efforts to address inequality. AI-powered military systems are altering the nature of warfare. These tools promise precision and reduced human risk but raise ethical questions about accountability and the risks of escalation.

Cybersecurity Threats

Cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure, elections, and financial systems have become central to inter-state competition. Emerging technologies like quantum computing could render current encryption methods obsolete, exposing sensitive systems to unprecedented risks. The absence of universal norms governing cyberspace amplifies these risks. Nations increasingly use cyber tools for espionage, sabotage, and strategic advantage, fueling tensions. Hackers, cybercriminals, and terrorist groups exploit vulnerabilities for profit or disruption, complicating defense strategies.

Private Sector

Corporations such as Google, SpaceX, and Huawei play pivotal roles in shaping global innovation and infrastructure. The private sector leads in AI and cybersecurity advancements, often outpacing government capabilities. Issues like data privacy, misinformation, and algorithmic bias highlight the need for stronger regulations, oversight, and accountability. Their influence requires careful management to ensure ethical and equitable outcomes. Yet, there is also an opportunity for public-private partnerships. Collaboration between governments and companies is essential to address shared challenges like cybercrime and data security.

12.3: Climate Change and Sustainability

Climate Change: The Defining Challenge

Climate change is a defining challenge of the 21st century, reshaping international relations and demanding urgent action. Rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, and biodiversity loss are not only environmental issues but also economic, security, and humanitarian concerns. How states and non-state actors respond to these challenges will shape the future of global stability.

Global Crisis of Biodiversity and Resources

Climate change exacerbates the degradation of ecosystems and the depletion of natural resources, presenting existential threats to both human and planetary health, including:

- **Biodiversity Loss:** Accelerated species extinction disrupts ecosystems, threatening food security, clean water, and resilience to climate change.
- **Resource Scarcity:** Diminishing access to critical resources such as freshwater intensifies competition among nations and regions, increasing the likelihood of conflict.
- **Diverting Resources:** Continued climate change will force states to rethink their resource distribution as they will have to divert funds into mitigation, adaptation, and geoengineering.

Localized Innovations and Green Geopolitics

While global frameworks are critical, many successful climate solutions begin at local levels and influence broader strategies, including:

- **Localized Solutions:** Cities and regional governments adopt renewable energy systems, sustainable urban planning, and conservation programs. These innovations often scale to national and global initiatives.
- **Green Geopolitics:** Countries leading in clean technologies like solar energy and electric vehicles gain geopolitical influence, creating new dynamics in trade and diplomacy.
- **New Metrics for Success:** Traditional economic models focusing on GDP growth are increasingly inadequate for addressing sustainability challenges.
- **Integrating Sustainability:** Economic systems must prioritize environmental health and societal well-being, redefining success to include equity, carbon neutrality, and ecosystem preservation.
- **Global Cooperation:** Initiatives like carbon markets and international climate financing aim to ensure that both developed and developing nations can transition to sustainable practices.

12.4: International Norms in Flux

Weakening International Norms

International norms, the backbone of global governance, are under significant pressure as geopolitical tensions rise and states diverge on fundamental principles. Human rights norms, once championed as universal, are increasingly contested. Authoritarian powers emphasize sovereignty and non-interference, challenging individual freedoms. At the same time, democratic nations face internal polarization, weakening their ability to lead on human rights. Issues such as migration, refugee protections, and pluralism now spark debates within democracies, reflecting resistance to principles once considered core values.

As multilateralism struggles, new patterns of norm development emerge. Regional organizations and coalitions of smaller states advance standards in areas like data privacy and climate change, while NGOs and private companies push for environmental protections and corporate accountability. These localized and issue-specific efforts highlight growing diversity in norm-setting but also expose the challenges of achieving global cohesion.

To address this fragmentation, innovative governance structures are gaining attention. Expanding sovereignty to include shared responsibility for global issues, increasing representation of the Global South, and broadening norms to encompass the rights of nature and future generations are among the proposed solutions. Balancing traditional principles with evolving frameworks will be essential to ensuring that international norms remain relevant and resilient.

12.5: The Future of Economic Interdependence

Changing Economic Interdependence

Global economic interdependence is being redefined as states adapt to rising protectionism and shifting trade dynamics. While globalization continues, it is increasingly fragmented along regional and ideological lines. Economic partnerships are becoming more focused and strategic, such as regional trade agreements that prioritize shared interests over broad multilateral frameworks. The strategic rivalry between the United States and China is driving a decoupling in sectors like semiconductors and green technology, creating parallel economic ecosystems. There is a growing emphasis on "fair trade" practices that protect workers, ensure environmental sustainability, and address global inequalities. The evolution of economic interdependence reflects the broader tensions between globalization and national priorities, requiring innovative approaches to balance these competing forces.

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12.6: Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

The future of international relations will be shaped by how effectively the global community responds to emerging challenges and opportunities. Themes such as governance reform, technological innovation, sustainability, shifting power dynamics, and normative evolution underscore the need for bold, inclusive, and adaptive approaches. By reimagining traditional frameworks and embracing collaborative solutions, the international system can navigate the complexities of the 21st century and build a more equitable and resilient global order.

Key Terms and Definitions

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** The development of computer systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as decision-making, language understanding, and pattern recognition.
- **Autonomous Weapons:** Weapons systems that can identify, target, and engage adversaries without human intervention, often powered by artificial intelligence.
- **Collaborative Sovereignty:** A governance approach where states share aspects of their sovereignty to collectively address transnational challenges, such as climate change and global health crises, through partnerships and pooled resources.
- **Fair Trade:** A trading system designed to ensure ethical and equitable practices in global commerce, prioritizing fair wages, safe working conditions, and sustainable production methods.
- **Mini-Lateralism:** A form of international cooperation involving small groups of states or actors working together to address specific issues, offering a more flexible and efficient alternative to broader multilateral frameworks.
- **Private Sector:** The part of the economy operated by businesses and corporations, independent of government control, often driving innovation and economic growth.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborative arrangements between governments and private sector entities to address public needs, combining resources and expertise from both sectors for infrastructure, technology, or social initiatives.

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12.9: Discussion Questions

Questions Based on Chapter 12

1. Do you agree with the claim that global issues such as climate change, pandemics, and digital security require collaborative approaches that transcend state-centric models?
2. How are technological innovations (AI and cybersecurity threats) impacting global politics?
3. In what sense is climate change a defining challenge of the 21st century?
4. How might shared responsibility for global issues, increased representation of the Global South, and broadening norms to encompass the rights of nature and future generations impact international relations?

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