



CDSn4001: Conflict Analysis

International systemic
causes of war: balance
of power

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Agenda

- Systemic theories in IR and war
- How does anarchy lead to war?
- How can we achieve peace in anarchy?
- Different types of realism
- Balance of power theory vs hegemonic stability theory
- Polarity in IR

Basic tenets of realism

Interest of states	Survival
How to achieve survival	Increase power
Human nature	Man is flawed and therefore prone to conflict
Anarchy	The environment in which sovereign nation-states act

The international structure

- Kenneth Waltz – an American political scientist and the father of neorealism
 - Asked: Why do wars occur?
- “International anarchy is the permissive cause of war.”
 - Sovereign nation-states in a system of international anarchy will behave conflictually, because there is nothing or no one to prevent conflict.

International anarchy

- International politics is composed of sovereign nation-states that are beholden to no higher power.
- There is no world government (i.e., self-help system)
- Anarchy in IR is **not** lack of order but **a lack of an orderer.**

Realism and power

- Hans Morgenthau: “International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power.”
- Power defined largely in terms of coercion.
- Mostly viewed as specific assets or material resources available to state.
 - Power is military power.
 - Economic power as an essential underpinning of military power.

(Classical) realism vs neorealism

Classical realism	Structural realism (neorealism)
Power for the sake of power: power as end	Power for security: power as means
Human nature as the cause of war	Anarchic structure as a necessary but not sufficient condition for war
Domestic factors matter (in a limited way)	Focus on states as unitary actors interacting in international system

Defensive vs offensive realism

STRUCTURAL REALISM	
DEFENSIVE	OFFENSIVE
States should gain “appropriate amount of power”	It makes sense for states to pursue as much power as possible
Pursuit of hegemony is foolish	States should pursue hegemony
Key writers: Waltz, Jervis	Key writers: Mearsheimer, Gilpin, Schweller

Balance of power theory

- **Balance of power:** A system in which no single actor is dominant; also, the distribution of power in such a system, which is not necessarily equal.
 - no single state is sufficiently powerful to defeat the others.

Hegemonic stability theory

- Stability results from unipolarity, in which one dominant state ensures some degree of order in the system.
- **Hegemon** = leader or dominant actor
 - “global cop”, reducing the degree of anarchy in the system
- War is most likely when the dominant position of the leader erodes, giving other states the temptation to seek dominance.
 - if the rising second-place state seeks to assert its power, or
 - if the hegemon attacks preemptively to crush the rising threat before it becomes even more powerful.

Balance of power vs hegemonic stability

- **Balance of power:** stability in balance; chances of war increase as one state seeks to dominate the others
- **Hegemonic stability:** stability in dominance; chances of war increase as the situation moves toward equality

Is this a realist world?

- Do you agree with realists? Why (not)?
- How do we achieve peace in a realist world? In a neorealist world?

Polarity in international politics

		Examples
Unipolarity	The hegemon keeps order, sets up the rules, mediates disputes, and opposes any autonomous action	Rome USA since 1991?
Bipolarity	Two competing great power hegemonies. Each presides over an alliance of weaker states.	Athens vs Sparta (5 th century BC) The Cold war
Tripolarity	With three great powers, no balance is possible. Each state seeks to avoid having the other two gang up on it.	?
Multipolarity	With a multiplicity of powers, multiple combinations can produce balance.	Almost all European history (19 th century Europe) World since 9/11?