

## **Realism and Liberalism: How relevant are they for explaining or understanding the Globalization of World Politics?**

M. 'BIMBO OGUNBANJO

Adonai University, Cotonou, Republic of Benin.

**Abstract.** Most of the history of international relations theory has seen a dispute between Realism and its Liberal rival, with the debate between them being the most long-standing and well-developed. Realism is the dominant theory of International Relations. Why? Because it provides the most powerful explanation for the state of war which is the regular condition of life in the international system. This is the bold claim made by realists in defence of their tradition, a claim which will be critically scrutinized in this paper. This paper asks whether there is one Realism or a variety of Realisms. The argument presented below suggests that despite important differences, particularly between classical and structural realism, it is possible to identify a shared core set of assumptions and ideas. This paper outlines these common elements, which are identified as self-help, statism, and survival. It stresses that although there are many voices claiming that a new set of actors and forces are collectively challenging the Westphalian sovereign state system, realists are generally sceptical of these claims, arguing that the same basic patterns that have shaped international politics in the past remain just as relevant today. This paper emphasizes that the practice of international relations has not been accommodating to Liberalism. Whereas the domestic political realm in many states has witnessed an impressive degree of progress, with institutions providing for order and justice, the international realm in the era of the modern states-system has been characterized by a precarious order and the absence of justice. This paper examines the core concepts of Liberalism, beginning with the visionary internationalism of the Enlightenment, through to the idealism of the inter-war period, and the institutionalism which became dominant in the second half of the twentieth century. The final section considers Realism and Liberalism in an era of globalization: in particular, it contrasts a status quo reading of the liberal project with a radicalized

version which seeks to promote and extend cosmopolitan values and institutions.

**Keywords:** International Relations, Realism, Liberalism, Globalization, Cold War, Idealism, State System, Theory and World Politics

### **1. Introduction**

The story of Realism most often begins with a mythical tale of the idealist or utopian writers of the inter-war period (1919-1939). Writing in the aftermath of the First World War (1914 - 1918), the 'idealists', a term that realist writers have retrospectively imposed on the inter-war scholars, focused much of their attention on understanding the cause of war so as to find a remedy for its existence. Yet according to the realists, the inter-war scholars' approach was flawed in a number of respects. They, for example, ignored the role of power, overestimated the degree to which human beings were rational, mistakenly believed that nation-states shared a set of common interests, and were overly optimistic that humankind could overcome the scourge of war. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 confirmed, for the realists at least, the inadequacies of the idealists' approach to studying international politics.

A new approach, one based on the timeless insights of Realism, replaced the discredited idealist approach. Histories of the academic field of International Relations describe a Great Debate that took place in the late 1930s and early 1940s between the inter-war idealists and a new generation of realist writers, which included E. H. Carr, Hans J. Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, and others, who all emphasized the ubiquity of power and the competitive nature of politics among nations. The standard account of the Great Debate is that the realists emerged victorious, and the rest of the

International Relations story is, in many respects, a footnote to Realism. It is important to note, however, that at its inception, there was a need for Realism to define itself against an alleged ‘idealist’ position. From 1939 to the present, leading theorists and policy-makers have continued to view the world through realist lenses. Realism taught American leaders to focus on interests rather than ideology, to seek peace through strength, and to recognize that great powers can coexist even if they have antithetical values and beliefs. The fact that Realism offers something of a ‘manual’ for maximizing the interests of the state in a hostile environment explains in part why it remains the dominant tradition in the study of world politics. This also helps to explain why alternative perspectives must of necessity engage with, and attempt to go beyond, Realism.

The theory of Realism that prevailed after the Second World War (1939 - 1945) is often claimed to rest on an older, classical tradition of thought. Indeed, many contemporary realist writers often claim to be part of an ancient tradition of thought that includes such illustrious figures as Thucydides (c.460-406BC), Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). The insights that these realists offered on the way in which state leaders should conduct themselves in the realm of international politics are often grouped under the doctrine of *raison d’état*, or reason of state. Together, writers associated with *raison d’état* are seen as providing a set of maxims to leaders on how to conduct their foreign affairs so as to ensure the security of the state.

According to the historian Friedrich Meinecke, *raison d’état* is the fundamental principle of international conduct, the State’s First Law of Motion. It tells the statesman what he must do to preserve the health and strength of the State (1957:1). Most importantly, the state, which is identified as the key actor in international politics, must pursue power, and it is the duty of the statesperson to calculate rationally the most appropriate steps that should be taken so as to perpetuate the life of the state in a hostile and threatening environment. For realists of all stripes, the survival of the state can never be guaranteed, because the use of force culminating in war is a legitimate instrument of statecraft. As we will see, the assumption that the state is the principal actor, coupled with the view that the environment which states inhabit is a perilous place, helps to define the essential core of Realism. There is, however, one issue in particular that theorists associated with *raison d’état*, and classical realism more generally, were

concerned with; that is, the role, if any, that morals and ethics occupy in international politics.

Realists are sceptical of the idea that universal moral principles exist and, therefore, warn state leaders against sacrificing their own self-interests in order to adhere to some indeterminate notion of ‘ethical’ conduct. Moreover, realists argue that the need for survival requires state leaders to distance themselves from traditional morality which attaches a positive value to caution, piety, and the greater good of humankind as a whole (Adebimpe 2018). Machiavelli argued that these principles were positively harmful if adhered to by state leaders. It was imperative that state leaders learned a different kind of morality which accorded not to traditional Christian virtues but to political necessity and prudence. Proponents of *raison d’état* often speak of a dual moral standard: one moral standard for individual citizens living inside the state and a different standard for the state in its external relations with other states. Justification for the two moral standards stems from the fact that the condition of international politics often make it necessary for state leaders to act in a manner (for example, cheating, lying, killing) that would be entirely unacceptable for the individual. But before we reach the conclusion that Realism is completely immoral, it is important to add that proponents of *raison d’état* argue that the state itself represents a moral force, for it is the existence of the state that creates the possibility for an ethical political community to exist domestically. Preserving the life of the state and the ethical community it envelops becomes a moral duty of the statesperson. Thus it is not the case that realists are unethical, rather they find that sometimes ‘it is kind to be cruel’ (Desch 2013).

Although the advanced student might be able to detect some subtle differences, it is fair to say that there is a significant degree of continuing between classical realism and modern variants. Indeed, the three core elements that we identify with Realism – statism, survival, and self-help—are present in the work of a classical realist such as Thucydides and structural realists such as Kenneth Waltz.

Realism identifies the group as the fundamental unit of political analysis. When Thucydides and Machiavelli were writing, the basic unit was the polis or city-state, but since the Peace of Westphalia (1648) realists consider the sovereign state as the principle actor in international politics. This is often referred to as the state-centric assumption of Realism. Statism is the term given to the idea of the state as the legitimate representative of the collective will of the

people (Chukwuemeka 2018: 234). The legitimacy of the state is what enables it to exercise authority within its domestic borders. Yet outside the boundaries of the state, realists argue that a condition of anarchy exists. By anarchy what is most often meant is that international politics takes place in an arena that has no overarching central authority above the individual collection of sovereign states. Thus rather than necessarily denoting complete chaos and lawlessness, the concept of anarchy is used by realists to emphasize the point that the international realm is distinguished by the lack of a central authority.

Following from this, realists draw a sharp distinction between domestic and international politics. Thus while Hans J. Morgenthau argues that ‘international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power’, he goes to great lengths to illustrate the qualitatively different result this struggle has on international politics as compared to domestic politics ([1948] 1955: 25). A prominent explanation that realists provide for this difference in behaviour relates to the different organizational structure of domestic and international politics. Realists argue that the basic structure of international politics is one of anarchy in that each of the independent sovereign states consider themselves to be their own highest authority and do not recognize a higher power above them. Conversely, domestic politics is often described as a hierarchical structure in which different political actors stand in various relations of super - and subordination.

It is largely on the basis of how realists depict the international environment that they conclude that the first priority for state leaders is to ensure the survival of their state. Under anarchy, the survival of the state cannot be guaranteed. Realists correctly assume that all states wish to perpetuate their existence. Looking back at history, however, realists note that the actions of some states resulted in other states losing their existence (for example, Poland has experienced this fate four times in the past three centuries). This is partly explained in light of the power differentials of states. Intuitively, states with more power stand a better chance of surviving than states with less power. Power is crucial to the realist lexicon and traditionally has been defined narrowly in military strategic terms. Yet irrespective of how much power a state may possess, the core national interest of all states must be survival. Like the pursuit of power, the promotion of the national interest is, according to realists, an iron law of necessity.

Self-help is the principle of action in an anarchical system where there is no global government.

According to Realism, each state actor is responsible for ensuring its own well-being and survival. Realists do not believe it is prudent for a state to entrust its safety and survival on another actor or international institution, such as the United Nations. States, in short, should not depend on other states or institutions to ensure their own security. Unlike in domestic politics, there is no emergency number that states can dial when they are in mortal danger.

You may at this point be asking what options are available to states to ensure their own security. Consistent with the principle of self-help, if a state feels threatened, it should seek to augment its own power capabilities by engaging, for example, in a military arms build-up. Yet this may prove to be insufficient for a number of smaller states who feel threatened by a much larger state. This brings us to one of the crucial mechanisms that realists throughout the ages have considered to be essential to preserving the liberty of states—the balance of power. Although various meanings have been attributed to the concept of the balance of power, the most common definition holds that if the survival of a state or a number of weaker states is threatened by a hegemonic state or coalition of stronger states, they should join forces, establish a formal alliance, and seek to preserve their own independence by checking the power of the opposing side. The mechanism of the balance of power seeks to ensure an equilibrium of power in which case no one state or coalition of states is in a position to dominate all the others. The Cold War competition between the East and West, as institutionalized through the formal alliance system of the Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), provides a prominent example of the balance of power mechanism in action.

The peaceful conclusion of the Cold War caught many realists off guard. Given that many realists claim a scientific basis to their causal account of the world, it is not surprising that their inability to foresee the dynamics that led to the end of the bipolar Cold War system sparked the publication of several powerful critiques of realist theory. Critics also maintained that realism was unable to provide a persuasive account of new developments such as regional integration, humanitarian intervention, the emergence of a security community in Western Europe, and the growing incidence of intra-state war wracking the global South. In addition, proponents of globalization argued that Realism’s privileged actor, the state, was in decline relative to non-state actors such as transnational corporations and powerful regional institutions. Critics also contend that Realism is unable to explain the increasing incidence

of intra-state wars plaguing the global South. Realists claim that their theory does indeed explain the incidence of intra-state conflicts. The cumulative weight of these criticisms led many to question the analytical and moral adequacy of realist thought.

By way of a response to the critics, it is worth reminding them that the death-knell of Realism has been sounded a number of times already, by scientific approach in the 1960s and transnationalism in the 1970s, only to see the resurgence of a robust form of structural realism in the 1980s (commonly termed neo-realism). In this respect Realism shares with Conservatism (its ideological godfather) the recognition that a theory without the means to change is without the means of its own preservation. The question of Realism's resilience touches upon one of its central claims, namely, that it is the embodiment of laws of international politics that remain true across time (history) and space (geopolitics). Thus while political conditions have changed since the end of the Cold War, realists believe that the world continues to operate according to the logic of Realism.

Although Realism is regarded as the dominant theory of international relations, Liberalism has a strong claim to being the historic alternative. In the twentieth century, liberal thinking influenced policy-making elites and public opinion in a number of Western states after the First World War (1914 - 1918), an era often referred to in academic international relations as Idealism. There was a brief resurgence of liberal sentiment at the end of the Second World War with the birth of the United Nations, although this beacon of hope was soon extinguished by the return of Cold War power politics. In the 1990s, Liberalism appeared resurgent as Western state leaders proclaimed a New World Order and intellectuals provided theoretical justifications for the inherent supremacy of their liberal ideas over all other competing ideologies. After 9/11, the pendulum has once again swung towards the realist pole as the USA and its allies have sought to consolidate their power and punish those whom they define as terrorists and the states that provide them with shelter.

How do we explain the divergent fortunes of Liberalism in the domestic and international domains? While liberal values and institutions have become deeply embedded in Europe and North America, the same values and institutions lack legitimacy worldwide. To invoke the famous phrase of Stanley Hoffmann's 'international affairs have been the nemesis of Liberalism'. 'The essence of

Liberalism', Hoffmann continues, 'is self-restraint, moderation, compromise and peace' whereas 'the essence of international politics is exactly the opposite: troubled peace, at best, or the state of war' (Hoffmann 1987: 396). This explanation comes as no surprise to realists, who argue that there can be no progress, no law, and no justice, where there is no common power. Despite the weight of this realist argument, those who believe in the liberal project have not conceded defeat. Liberals argue that power politics itself is the product of ideas, and crucially, ideas can change. Therefore, even if the world has been inhospitable to Liberalism, this does not mean that it cannot be re-made in its image.

While the belief in the possibility of progress is one identifier of a liberal approach to politics (Clark 2009: 49-66), there are other general propositions that define the broad tradition of Liberalism. Perhaps the appropriate way to begin this discussion is with a four-dimensional definition (Doyle 2017: 207). First, all citizens are juridically equal and possess certain basic rights to education, access to a free press, and religious toleration. Second, the legislative assembly of the state possesses only the authority invested in it by the people, whose basic rights it is not permitted to abuse. Third, a key dimension of the liberty of the individual is the right to own property, including productive forces. Fourth, Liberalism contends that the most effective system of economic exchange is one that is largely market driven and not one that is subordinate to bureaucratic regulation and control, either domestically or internationally. When these propositions are taken together, we see a stark contrast between liberal values of individualism, tolerance, freedom, and constitutionalism, and conservatism, which places a higher value on order and authority and is willing to sacrifice the liberty of the individual for the stability of the community.

Although many writers have tended to view Liberalism as a theory of government, what is becoming increasingly apparent is the explicit connection between Liberalism as a political and economic theory and Liberalism as an international theory. Properly conceived, liberal thought on a global scale embodies a domestic analogy operating at multiple levels. Like individuals, states have different characteristics—some are bellicose and war-prone, others are tolerant and peaceful: in short, the identity of the state determines its outward orientation. Liberals see further parallel between individuals and sovereign states. Although the character of states may differ, all states are accorded certain 'natural' rights, such as the generalized right to non-intervention in their domestic affairs. On

another level, the domestic analogy refers to the extension of ideas that originated inside liberal states to the international realm, such as the coordinating role played by institutions and the centrality of the rule of law to the idea of a just order. In a sense, the historical project of Liberalism is the domestication of the international.

Liberals concede that we have far to go before this goal has been reached. Historically, liberals have agreed with Realists that war is a recurring feature of the anarchic states system. But unlike realists, they do not identify anarchy as the cause of war. How, then, do liberals explain war? Certain strands of Liberalism see the causes of war located in imperialism, others in the failure of the balance of power, and still others in the problem of undemocratic regimes. And ought this to be remedied through collective security, commerce, or world government? While it can be productive to think about the various strands of liberal thought and their differing prescriptions (Doyle 2017: 205–300), given the limited space permitted to deal with a broad and complex tradition, the emphasis below will be on the core concepts of international Liberalism and the way in which these relate to the goals of order and justice on a global scale.

As can be seen from a critical appraisal of the four-fold definition presented above, Liberalism pulls in two directions: its commitment to freedom in the economic and social spheres leans in the direction of a minimalist role for governing institutions, while the democratic political culture required for basic freedoms to be safeguarded requires robust and interventionist institutions. This has variously been interpreted as a tension between different liberal goals, or more broadly as a sign of rival and incompatible conceptions of Liberalism. Should a liberal polity—no matter what the size or scale—preserve the right of individuals to retain property and privilege, or should Liberalism elevate equality over liberty so that resources are redistributed from the strong to the weak? When we are looking at politics on a global scale it is clear that inequalities are far greater while at the same time our institutional capacity to do something about them is that much less. As writers on globalization remind us, the intensification of global flows in trade, resources, and people has weakened the state's capacity to govern. Closing this gap requires nothing short of a radical reconfiguration of the relationship between territoriality and governance.

## 2. One Realism, or Many?

The intellectual exercise of articulating a unified theory of Realism has been criticized by writers who

are both sympathetic and critical of the tradition (Smith 2016; Doyle 2017). The belief that there is not one Realism, but many, leads logically to a delineation of different types of Realism. A number of thematic classifications have been offered to differentiate Realism into a variety of distinct categories. The most simple distinction is a form of periodization that differentiates realism into three historical periods: classical realism (up to the twentieth century), which is frequently depicted as beginning with Thucydides' text on the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta and incorporating the ideas of many of those included in the classic canon of Western political thought; modern realism (1939–1979), which typically takes the so-called First Great Debate between the scholars of the inter-war period and a new wave of scholars who began to enter the field immediately before and after the Second World War (1939 - 1945) as its point of departure; and structural or neo-realism (1979 onwards), which officially entered the picture following the publication of Kenneth Waltz's landmark text **Theory of International Politics** (1979). While these different periods suggest a neat historical sequence, they are problematic in so far as they close down the important question about divergence within each historical phase. Rather than opt for the neat but intellectually unsatisfactory system of historical periodization, we outline below our own representation of realisms that makes important connections with existing categories deployed by other thinkers in the field. A summary of the varieties of Realism outlined below is contained in Table 1.1.

### 2.1 Classical Realism

The classical realist lineage begins with Thucydides' representation of power politics as a law of human behaviour. The drive for power and the will to dominate are held to be fundamental aspects of human nature. The behaviour of the state as a self-seeking egoist is understood to be merely a reflection of the characteristics of the people that comprise the state. It is human nature that explains why international politics is necessarily power politics. This reduction of Realism to a condition of human nature is one that frequently reappears in the leading works of the realist canon, most famously in the work of the high priest of post-war Realism, Hans J. Morgenthau. Classical realists argue that it is from the nature of man that the essential features of international politics, such as competition, fear, and war can be explained. Morgenthau notes, 'politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature' (Morgenthau

[1948] 1955: 4). The important point for Morgenthau is, first, to recognize that these laws exist and, second, to devise the most appropriate policies that are consistent with the basic fact that human beings

are flawed creatures. For both Thucydides and Morgenthau, the essential continuity of the power-seeking behaviour of states is rooted in the biological drives of human beings.

**Table 1.1** A Taxonomy of Realisms

Type of Realism	Type of Realism	Key Thinkers	Key Texts	'Big Idea'
<b>Classical Realism (Human Nature)</b>	Classical (Human Nature)	Thuc Thucydides (c. 400 BC)	The Peloponnesian War	International politics is driven by an endless struggle for power which has its roots in human nature. Justice, law, and society have either no place or are circumscribed.
		Mac Machiavelli (1532)	The Prince	Political realism recognizes that principles are subordinated to policies; the ultimate skill of the state leader is to accept, and adapt to, the changing power political configurations in world politics.
		Morg Morgenthau (1948)	Politics Among Nations	Politics is governed by laws that are created by human nature. The mechanism we use to understand international politics is through the concept of interests, defined in terms of power.
<b>Structural Realism (International System)</b>	Structural (International System)	Rous Rousseau (c. 1750)	The State of War	It is not human nature but the anarchical system which fosters fear, jealousy, suspicion, and insecurity.
		Walt Waltz (1979)	Theory of International Politics	Anarchy leads to a logic of self-help in which states seek to maximize their security. The most stable distribution of power in the system is bipolarity.
		Mear Mearsheimer (2001)	Tragedy of Great Power Politics	The anarchical, self-help system compels states to maximize their relative power position.
<b>Neoclassical Realism</b>	Neoclassical	Zaka Zakaria (2008)	From Wealth to Power	The systemic account of world politics provided by structural realism is incomplete. It needs to be supplemented with better accounts of unit level variables such as how power is perceived, and how leadership is exercised.

Another distinguishing characteristic of classical realism is its adherents belief in the primordial character of power and ethics. Classical realism is fundamentally about the struggle for belonging, a struggle that is often violent. Patriotic virtue is required in order for communities to survive in this historic battle between good and evil, a virtue that long predates the emergence of sovereignty-based notions of community in the mid-seventeenth century. Classical realists therefore differ from contemporary realists in the sense that they engaged with moral philosophy and sought to reconstruct an understanding of virtue in light of practice and historical circumstance. Two classical realists who wrestled with the degree to which state leaders could be guided by ethical considerations were Thucydides and Machiavelli.

Thucydides was the historian of the Peloponnesian War, a conflict between two great powers in the ancient Greek world, Athens and Sparta. Thucydides' work has been admired by subsequent generations of realists for the insights he raised about many of the perennial issues of international politics. Thucydides' explanation of the underlying cause of the war was

'the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta' (Ayodele 2019). This is considered to be a classic example of the impact that the anarchical structure of international politics has on the behaviour of state actors. Thucydides makes it clear that Sparta's national interest, like that of all states, was survival, and the changing distribution of power represented a direct threat to its existence (Ayodele 2019). Sparta was, therefore, compelled by necessity to go to war in order to forestall being vanquished by Athens. Thucydides also makes it clear that Athens felt equally compelled to pursue power in order to preserve the empire it had acquired. The famous Athenian leader, Pericles, claimed to be acting on the basis of the most fundamental of human motivations: ambition, fear, and self-interest.

One of the significant episodes of the war between Athens and Sparta is known as the 'Melian dialogue' and represents a fascinating illustration of a number of key realist principles. The Case Study reconstructs the dialogue between the Athenian leaders who arrived on the island of Melos to assert their right of conquest over the islanders and the response this provoked. In short, what the Athenians are asserting

over the Melians is the logic of power politics. Because of their vastly superior military force, they are able to present a *fait accompli* to the Melians: either submit peacefully or be exterminated. The Melians for their part try to buck the logic of power politics, appealing in turn with arguments grounded in justice, God, and their allies the Spartans. As the dialogue makes clear, the Melians were forced to submit to the realist iron law that ‘the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept’.

Later classical realists—notably Machiavelli and Morgenthau—would concur with Thucydides’ suggestion that the logic of power politics has universal applicability. Instead of Athens and Melos, we could just as easily substitute the vulnerability of Machiavelli’s beloved Florence to the expansionist policies of external great powers. In Morgenthau’s era, there were many examples where the innate drive for more power and territory seemed to confirm the realist iron law: for example, Nazi Germany and Czechoslovakia in 1939, and the Soviet Union and Hungary in 1956. The seemingly endless cycle of war and conflict confirmed in the minds of twentieth-century classical realists the essentially aggressiveness impulses in human nature. For Morgenthau, ‘the drives to live, to propagate, and to dominate are common to all men’ (Morgenthau 1955: 30). How is a leader supposed to act in a world animated by such dark forces? The answer given by Machiavelli is that all obligations and treaties with other states must be disregarded if the security of the community is under threat. Moreover, imperial expansion is legitimate as it is a means of gaining greater security. Other classical realists, however, advocate a more temperate understanding of moral conduct. Mid-twentieth-century realists such as Butterfield, Carr, Morgenthau, and Wolfers believed that anarchy could be mitigated by wise leadership and the pursuit of the national interest in ways that are compatible with international order. Taking their lead from Thucydides, they recognized that acting purely on the basis of power and self-interest without any consideration of moral and ethical principles frequently results in self-defeating policies. After all, as Thucydides showed, Athens suffered an epic defeat while following the realist tenet of self-interest.

## 2.2 Structural Realism

Structural realists concur that international politics is essentially a struggle for power but they do not endorse the classical realist assumption that this is a result of human nature. Instead, structural realists

attribute security competition and inter-state conflict to the lack of an overarching authority above states and the relative distribution of power in the international system. Waltz defined the structure of the international system in terms of three elements—organizing principles, differentiation of units and distribution of capabilities. Waltz identifies two different organizing principles: anarchy, which corresponds to the decentralized realm of international politics, and hierarchy, which is the basis of domestic order. He argues that the units of the international system are functionally similar sovereign states, hence unit level variation is irrelevant in explaining international outcomes. It is the third tier, the distribution of capabilities across units, that is, according to Waltz, of fundamental importance to understanding crucial international outcomes. According to structural realists, the relative distribution of power in the international system is the key independent variable to understanding important international outcomes such as war and peace, alliance politics, and the balance of power. Structural realists are interested in providing a rank-ordering of states so as to be able to differentiate and count the number of great powers that exist at any particular point in time. The number of great powers, in turn, determines the structure of the international system. For example, during the Cold War from 1945 to 1989 there were two great powers—the United States and the Soviet Union—that constituted the bipolar international system.

How does the international distribution of power impact the behaviour of states, particularly their power-seeking behaviour? In the most general sense, Waltz argues that states, especially the great powers, have to be sensitive to the capabilities of other states. The possibility that any state may use force to advance its interests results in all states being worried about their survival. According to Waltz, power is a means to the end of security. In a significant passage, Waltz writes ‘because power is a possibly useful means, sensible statesmen try to have an appropriate amount of it’. He adds, ‘in crucial situations, however, the ultimate concern of states is not for power but for security’ (Waltz 1989: 40). In other words, rather than being power maximizers, states, according to Waltz, are security maximizers. Waltz argues that power maximization often proves to be dysfunctional because it triggers a counter-balancing coalition of states.

A different account of the power dynamics that operate in the anarchic system is provided by John Mearsheimer’s theory of offensive realism, which is another variant of structural realism. While sharing

many of the same basic assumptions with Waltz's structural realist theory, which is frequently termed defensive realism, Mearsheimer differs from Waltz when it comes to describing the behaviour of states. Most fundamentally, 'offensive realism parts company with defensive realism over the question of how much power states want' (Mearsheimer 2001: 21). According to Mearsheimer, the structure of the international system compels states to maximize their relative power position. Under anarchy, he agrees that self-help is the basic principle of action. Yet he also argues that not only do all states possess some offensive military capability, but there is a great deal of uncertainty about the intentions of other states. Consequently, Mearsheimer concludes that there are no satisfied or status quo states; rather, all states are continuously searching for opportunities to gain power at the expense of other states. Contrary to Waltz, Mearsheimer argues that states recognize that the best path to peace is to accumulate more power than anyone else. Indeed, the ideal position, although one that Mearsheimer argues is virtually impossible to achieve, is to be the global hegemon of the international system. Yet because Mearsheimer believes that global hegemony is impossible, he concluded that the world is condemned to perpetual great power competition.

### **3. Contemporary Realist Challenges to Structural Realism**

While offensive realism makes an important contribution to realism, some contemporary realists are sceptical of the notion that the international distribution of power alone can explain the behaviour of states. Since the end of the Cold War a group of scholars have attempted to move beyond the parsimonious assumptions of structural and incorporated a number of additional factors located at the individual and domestic level into their explanation of international politics. While systemic factors are recognized to be an important influence on the behaviour of states, so are factors such as the perceptions of state leaders, state-society relationships, and the motivation of states. In attempting to build a bridge between structural and unit level factors (which many classical realists emphasized), this group of scholars has been characterized by Gideon Rose (2008) as 'neoclassical realists'. According to Stephen Walt, the causal logic of neoclassical realism 'places domestic politics as an intervening variable between the distribution of power and foreign policy behaviour' (Walt 2002: 211).

One important intervening variable is leaders themselves, namely how they perceive the

international distribution of power. There is no objective, independent reading of the distribution of power: rather, what matters is how state leaders derive an understanding of the distribution of power. While structural realists assume that all states have a similar set of interests, neoclassical realists such as Randall Schweller (2006) argue that historically this is not the case. He argues that with respect to Waltz, the assumption that all states have an interest in security results in neo-realism exhibiting a profoundly status quo basis. Schweller return to the writing of realist such as Morgenthau and Kissinger to remind us of the key distinction that they made between status quo and revisionist states. Neoclassical realists would argue that the fact that Germany was a revisionist state in the 1930s and a status quo state since the end of the Second World War is of fundamental importance to understanding its role in the international system. Not only do states differ in terms of their interests, but they also differ in terms of their ability to extract and direct resources from the societies that they rule. Fareed Zakaria (2008) introduces the intervening variable of state strength into his theory of state-centred realism. State strength is defined as the ability of a state to mobilize and direct the resources at its disposal in the pursuit of particular interests. Neoclassical realists argue that different types of states possess different capacities to translate the various elements of national power into state power. Thus, contrary to Waltz, all states cannot be treated as 'like units'.

Given the varieties of Realism that exist, it is hardly surprising that the overall coherence of the realist tradition of inquiry has been questioned. The answer to the question of 'coherence' is, of course, contingent upon how strict the criteria are for judging the continuities which underpin a particular theory. Here it is perhaps a mistake to understand traditions as a single stream of thought, handed down in a neatly wrapped package from one generation of realists to another. Instead, it is preferable to think of living traditions like Realism as the embodiment of both continuities and conflicts. Despite the different strands running through the tradition, there is a sense in which all realists share a common set of propositions.

### **4. The Essential Realism**

The previous paragraphs have argued that Realism is a theoretical broad church, embracing a variety of authors and texts. Despite the numerous denominations, we argue that all realists subscribe to the following 'three Ss': statism, survival, self-help.

Each of these elements is considered in more details in the subsections below.

#### 4.1 Statism

For realists, the state is the main actor and sovereignty is its distinguishing trait. The meaning of the sovereign state is inextricably bound up with the use of force. In terms of its internal dimension, to illustrate this relationship between violence and the state we need to look no further than Max Weber's famous definition of state as 'the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory (Smith 2016: 23). Within this territorial space, sovereignty means that the state has supreme authority to make and enforce laws. This is the basis of the unwritten contract between individuals and the state. According to Hobbes, for example, we trade our liberty in return for a guarantee of security. Once security has been established, civil society can begin. But in the absence of security, there can be no art, no culture, no society. The first move, then, for the realist is to organize power domestically. Only after power has been organized, can community begin.

Realist international theory appears to operate according to the assumption that, domestically, the problem of order and security is solved. However, on the 'outside', in the relations among independent sovereign states, insecurities, dangers, and threats to the very existence of the state loom large. Realists largely explain this on the basis that the very condition for order and security—namely, the existence of a sovereign—is missing from the international realm.

Realists claim that in anarchy, states compete with other states for power and security. The nature of the competition is viewed in zero-sum terms; in other words, more for one actor means less for another. This competitive logic of power politics makes agreement on universal principles difficult, apart from the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other sovereign states. But even this principle, designed to facilitate coexistence, is suspended by realists who argue that in practice non-intervention does not apply in relations between great powers and their 'near abroad'. As evidenced by the most recent behaviour of the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq, powerful states are able to overturn the non-intervention principle on the grounds of national security and international order.

Given that the first move of the state is to organize power domestically, and the second is to accumulate power internationally, it is self-evidently important to

consider in more depth what realists mean by their ubiquitous fusion of politics with power. It is one thing to say that international politics is a struggle for power, but this merely begs the question of what realists mean by power. Morgenthau offers the following definition of power: 'man's control over the minds and actions of other men' ([1948] 1955: 26). There are two important points that realists make about the elusive concept of power. First, power is a relational concept; one does not exercise power in a vacuum, but in relation to another entity. Second, power is a relative concept; calculations need to be made not only about one's own power capabilities, but about the power that other state actors possess. Yet the task of accurately assessing the power of states is infinitely complex, and often is reduced to counting the number of troops, tanks, aircraft, and naval ships a country possesses in the belief that this translates in the ability to get other actors to do something they would not otherwise do.

There have been a number of criticisms made of how realists define and measure power. Critics argue that Realism has been purchased at a discount precisely because its currency, power, has remained under-theorized and inconsistently used. Simply by asserting that states seek power provides no answer to crucial questions. Why do states struggle for power? Surely power is a means to an end rather than an end in itself? Is there not a difference between the mere possession of power and the ability to change the behaviour of others?

Structural realists have attempted to bring more conceptual clarity to bear on the meaning of power. Waltz tries to overcome the problem by shifting the focus from power to capabilities. He suggests that capabilities can be ranked according to their strength in the following areas: 'size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence' (1979: 131). The difficulty here is that resource strength does not always lead to military victory. For example, in the 1967 Six Day War between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, the distribution of resources clearly favoured the Arab coalition and yet the supposedly weaker side annihilated its enemies' forces and seized their territory. The definition of power as capabilities is even less successful at explaining the relative economic success of Japan over China. A more sophisticated understanding of power would focus on the ability of a state to control or influence its environment in situations that are not necessarily conflictual.

An additional weakness with the realist treatment of power concerns its exclusive focus upon state power.

For realists, states are the only actors that really 'count'. Transnational corporations, international organizations, and ideologically driven terrorist networks, such as Al Qaeda, rise and fall but the state is the one permanent feature in the landscape of modern global politics. Yet many today question the adequacy of the state-centric assumption of realism.

#### 4.2 Survival

The second principle that unites realists is the assertion that, in international politics, the pre-eminent goal is survival. Although there is an ambiguity in the works of the realists as to whether the accumulation of power is an end in itself, one would think that there is no dissenting from the argument that the ultimate concern of states is for security. Survival is held to be a precondition for attaining all other goals, whether these involve conquest or merely independence. According to Waltz, 'beyond the survival motive, the aims of states may be endlessly varied' (1979: 91). Yet, as we mentioned in the previous section, a recent controversy among structural realists has arisen over the question of whether states are in fact principally security or power maximizers. Defensive realists such as Waltz argue that states have security as their principal interest and therefore only seek the requisite amount of power to ensure their own survival. According to this view, states are profoundly defensive actors and will not seek to gain greater amounts of power if that means jeopardizing their own security. Offensive realists such as Mearsheimer argue that the ultimate goal of all states is to achieve a hegemonic position in the international system. States, according to this view, always desire more power and are willing, if the opportunity arises, to alter the existing distribution of power even if such an action may jeopardize their own security. In terms of survival, defensive realists hold that the existence of status quo powers lessens the competition for power while offensive realists argue that the competition is always keen because revisionist states and aspiring hegemonies are always willing to take risks with the aim of improving their position in the international system.

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) tried to make a 'science' out of his reflections on the art of survival. His short and engaging book, *The Prince*, was written with the explicit intention of codifying a set of maxims that will enable leaders to maintain their hold on power. In important respects, we find two related Machiavellian themes recurring in the writing of modern realists, both of which derive from the idea that the realm of international politics requires

different moral and political rules from those which apply in domestic politics. The task of understanding the real nature of international politics, and the need to protect the state at all costs (even if this may mean the sacrifice of one's own citizens) places a heavy burden on the shoulders of state leaders. In the words of Henry Kissinger, the academic realist who became Secretary of State during the Nixon Presidency, 'a nation's survival is its first and ultimate responsibility; it cannot be compromised or put to risk' (1977: 204). Their guide must be an ethic of responsibility: the careful weighing up of consequences; the realization that individual acts of an immoral kind might have to be taken for the greater good. By way of an example, think of the ways in which governments frequently suspend the legal and political rights of 'suspected terrorists' in view of the threat they pose to national security. An ethic of responsibility is frequently used as a justification for breaking the laws of war, as in the case of the United States decision to drop nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The principal difficulty with the realist formulation of an 'ethics of responsibility' is that, while instructing leaders to consider the consequences of their actions, it does not provide a guide to how state leaders should weight the consequences (Smith 2016:51).

Not only does Realism provide an alternative moral code for state leaders, it suggests a wider objection to the whole enterprise of bringing ethics into international politics. Starting from the assumption that each state has its own particular values and beliefs, realists argue that the state is the supreme good and there can be no community beyond borders. This moral relativism had generated a substantial body of criticism, particularly from liberal theorists who endorse the notion of universal human rights.

#### 4.3 Self-Help

Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979) brought to the realist tradition a deeper understanding of the international system within which states coexist. Unlike many other realists, Waltz argued that international politics was not unique because of the regularity of war and conflict, since this was also familiar in domestic politics. The key difference between domestic and international orders lies in their structure. In the domestic polity, citizens do not have to defend themselves. In the international system, there is no higher authority to prevent and counter the use of force. Security can therefore only be realized through self-pity. In an anarchic structure, 'self-help is necessarily the principle of action' (Waltz 1979: 111). But in the course of providing for

one's own security, the state in question will automatically be fuelling the insecurity of other states.

The term given to this spiral of insecurity is the security dilemma. According to Wheeler and Booth, security dilemmas exist 'when the military preparations of one state create an unresolvable uncertainty in the mind of another as to whether those preparations are for 'defensive' purposes only (to enhance its security in an uncertain world) or whether they are for offensive purposes (to change the status quo to its advantage)' (2012: 30). This scenario suggests that one state's quest for security is often another state's source of insecurity. States find it very difficult to trust one another and often view the intentions of others in a negative light. Thus the military preparations of one state are likely to be matched by neighbouring states. The irony is that at the end of the day, states often feel no more secure than before they undertook measures to enhance their own security.

In a self-help system, structural realists argue that the balance of power will emerge even in the absence of a conscious policy to maintain the balance (i.e. prudent statecraft). Waltz argues that balances of power result irrespective of the intentions of any particular state. In an anarchic system populated by states who seek to perpetuate themselves, alliances will be formed that seek to check and balance the power against threatening states. Classical realists, however, are more likely to emphasize the crucial role state leaders and diplomats play in maintaining the balance of power. In other words, the balance of power is not natural or inevitable, it must be constructed.

There is a lively debate among realists concerning the stability of the balance of power system. This is especially the case today in that many argue that the balance of power has been replaced by an unbalanced unipolar order. It is questionable whether other countries will actively attempt to balance against the United States as structural realism would predict. Whether it is the contrived balance of the Concert of Europe in the early nineteenth century, or the more fortuitous balance of the Cold War, balances of power are broken—either through war or peaceful change—and new balances emerge. What the perennial collapsing of the balance of power demonstrates is that states are at best able to mitigate the worst consequences of the security dilemma but are not able to escape it. The reason for this terminal condition is the absence of trust in international relations.

Historically, realists have illustrated the lack of trust among states by reference to the parable of the 'stag hunt'. In **Man, the State and War**, Kenneth Waltz revisits Rousseau's parable:

Assume that five men who acquired a rudimentary ability to speak and to understand each other happen to come together at a time when all of them suffer from hunger. The hunger of each will be satisfied by the fifth part of a stag, so they 'agree' to cooperate in a project to trap one. But also the hunger of any one of them will be satisfied by a hare, so, as a hare comes within reach, one of them grabs it. The defector obtains the means of satisfying his hunger but in doing so permits the stag to escape. His immediate interest prevails over consideration for his fellows (1959: 167-8).

Waltz argues that the metaphor of the stag hunt provides a basis for understanding the problem of coordinating the interests of the individual versus the interests of the common good, and the pay-off between short-term interests and long-term interests. In the self-help system of international politics, the logic of self-interest mitigates against the provision of collective goods, such as 'security' or 'free trade'. In this case of the latter, according to the theory of comparative advantage, all states would be wealthier in a world that allowed freedom of goods and services across borders. But individual states, or groups of states like the European Union (EU), can increase their wealth by pursuing protectionist policies providing other states do not respond in kind. Of course the logical outcome is for the remaining states to become protectionist, international trade collapses, and a world recession reduces the wealth of each state. Thus the question is not whether all will be better off through cooperation, but rather who will likely gain more than another. It is because of this concern with relative gains issues that realists argue that cooperation is difficult to achieve in a self-help system.

##### 5. Core Ideas in Liberal Thinking on International Relations

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) were two of the leading liberals of the Enlightenment. Both were reacting to the barbarity of international relations, or what Kant graphically described as 'the lawless state of savagery', at a time when domestic politics was at the cusp of a new age of rights, citizenship, and constitutionalism. Their abhorrence of the lawless savagery led them individually to elaborate plans for 'perpetual peace'. Although written over two centuries ago, these

manifestos contain the seeds of core liberal ideas, in particular the belief that reason could deliver freedom and justice in international relations. For Kant the imperative to achieve perpetual peace required the transformation of individual consciousness, republican constitutionalism, and a federal contract between states to abolish war (rather than to regulate it as earlier international lawyers had argued). This federation can be likened to a permanent peace treaty, rather than a 'superstate' actor or world government.

Kant's claim that liberal states are pacific in their international relations with other liberal states was revived in the 1980s. In a much cited article, Michael Doyle argued that liberal states have created a 'separate peace' (2006: 1151). According to Doyle, there are two elements to the Kantian legacy: restraint among liberal states and 'international imprudence' in relations with non-liberal states. Although the empirical evidence seems to support the democratic peace thesis, it is important to bear in mind the limitations of the argument. In the first instance, for the theory to be compelling, believers in the thesis need to provide an explanation as to why war has become unthinkable between liberal states. Kant had argued that if the decision to use force was taken by the people, rather than by the prince, then the frequency of conflicts would be drastically reduced. But logically, this argument implies a lower frequency of conflicts between liberal and non-liberal states, and this has proven to be contrary to the historical evidence. An alternative explanation for the democratic peace thesis might be that liberal states tend to be wealthy, and therefore have less to gain (and more to lose) by engaging in conflicts than poorer authoritarian states. Perhaps the most convincing explanation of all is the simple fact that liberal states tend to be in relations of amity with other liberal states. War between Canada and the USA is unthinkable, perhaps not because of their liberal democratic constitutions, but because they are friends (Wendt 2009: 298-9) with a high degree of convergence in economic and political matters. Indeed, war between states with contrasting political and economic systems may also be unthinkable because they have a history of friendly relations. An example here is Mexico and Cuba, which maintain close bilateral relations despite their history of divergent economic ideologies.

Irrespective of the scholarly search for an answer to the reasons why liberal democratic states are more peaceful, it is important to note the political consequences of this hypothesis. In 1989 Francis Fukuyama wrote an article entitled '**The End of History**' which celebrated the triumph of Liberalism

over all other ideologies, contending that liberal states were more stable internally and more peaceful in their international relations (Fukuyama 1989: 3-18). Other defenders of the democratic peace thesis were more circumspect. As Doyle recognized, liberal democracies are as aggressive as any other types of state in their relations with authoritarian regimes and stateless peoples (Doyle 2005: 100). How, then, should states inside the liberal zone of peace conduct their relations with non-liberal regimes? How can the positive Kantian legacy of restraint triumph over the historical legacy of international imprudence on the part of liberal states? These are fascinating and timely questions which will be taken up in the final section of the paper.

Two centuries after Kant first called for a 'pacific federation', the validity of the idea that democracies are more pacific continues to attract a great deal of scholarly interest. The claim has also found its way into the public discourse of Western states' foreign policy, appearing in speeches made by US presidents as diverse as Ronald Reagan, William Jefferson Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barak Obama. Less crusading voices within the liberal tradition believe that a legal and institutional framework must be established that includes states with different cultures and traditions. Such a belief in the power of law to solve the problem of war was advocated by Jeremy Bentham at the end of the eighteenth century. 'Establish a common tribunal' and 'the necessity for war no longer follows from a difference of opinion' (Luard 2012: 416). Like many liberal thinkers after him, Bentham showed that federal states such as the German Diet, the American Confederation, and the Swiss League were able to transform their identity from one based on conflicting interests to a more peaceful federation. As Bentham famously argued, 'between the interests of nations there is nowhere any real conflict'.

Cobden's belief that free trade would create a more peaceful world order is a core idea of nineteenth-century Liberalism. Trade brings mutual gains to all the players, irrespective of their size or the nature of their economies. It is perhaps not surprising that it was in Britain that this argument found its most vocal supporters. The supposed universal value of free trade brought disproportionate gains to the hegemonic power. There was never an admission that free trade among countries at different stages of development would lead to relations of dominance and subservience.

The idea of a natural harmony of interests in international political and economic relations came

under challenge in the early part of the twentieth century. The fact that Britain and Germany had highly interdependent economies before the Great War (1914-18) seemed to confirm the fatal flaw in the association of economic interdependence with peace. From the turn of the century, the contradictions within European civilization, of progress and exemplarism on the one hand and the harnessing of industrial power for military purposes on the other, could no longer be contained. Europe stumbled into a horrific war killing 15 million people. The war not only brought an end to three empires but also was a contributing factor to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

The First World War shifted liberal thinking towards a recognition that peace is not a natural condition but is one which must be constructed. In a powerful critique of the idea that peace and prosperity were art of a latent natural order, the publicist and author Leonard Woolf argued that peace and prosperity required ‘consciously devised machinery’ (Luard 2012: 465). But perhaps the most famous advocate of an international authority for the management of international relations was Woodrow Wilson. According to this US President, peace could only be secured with the creation of an international organization to regulate the international anarchy. Security could not be left to secret bilateral diplomatic deals and a blind faith in the balance of power (Asekun 2019: 277). Just as peace had to be enforced in domestic society, the international domain had to have a system of regulation for coping with disputes and an international force which could be mobilized if non-violent conflict resolution failed. In this sense, more than any other strand of Liberalism, Idealism rests on the domestic analogy (Suganami 2009: 94-113).

In his famous ‘Fourteen Points’ speech, addressed to Congress in January 1918, Wilson argued that ‘a general association of nations must be formed’ to preserve the coming peace—the League of Nations was to be that general association. For the League to be effective, it has to have the military power to deter aggression and, when necessary, to use a preponderance of power to enforce its will. This was the idea behind the collective security system which was central to the League of Nations. Collective security refers to an arrangement where ‘each state in the system accepts that the security of one is the concern of all, and agrees to join in a collective response to aggression’ (Roberts and Kingsbury 2013: 30). It can be contrasted with an alliance system of security, where a number of states join together usually as a response to a specific external

threat (sometimes known as collective defence). In the case of the League of Nations, Article 16 of the League’s Charter noted the obligation that, in the event of war, all member states must cease normal relations with the offending states, impose sanctions, and, if necessary, commit their armed forces to the disposal of the League Council should the use of force be required to restore the status quo (Chidiebere 2018).

The League’s constitution also called for the self-determination of all nations, another founding characteristic of liberal idealist thinking on international relations. Going back to the mid-nineteenth century, self-determination movements in Greece, Hungary, and Italy received support among liberal powers and public opinion. Yet the default support for self-determination masked a host of practical and moral problems that were laid bare after Woodrow Wilson issued his proclamation. What would happen to newly created minorities who felt no allegiance to the self-determining state? Could a democratic process adequately deal with questions of identity — who was to decide what constituency was to participate in a ballot? And what if a newly self-determined state rejected liberal democratic norms?

The experience of the League of Nations was a disaster. While the moral rhetoric at the creation of the League was decidedly idealist, in practice states remained imprisoned by self-interest. There is no better example of this than the United States’ decision not to join the institution it has created. With the Soviet Union outside the system for ideological reasons, the League of Nations quickly became a talking shop for the ‘satisfied’ powers. Hitler’s decision in March 1936 to reoccupy the Rhineland, a designated demilitarized zone according to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, effectively pulled the plug on the League’s life-support system (it had been put on the ‘critical’ list following the Manchurian crisis in 1931 and the Ethiopian crisis in 1935).

According to the history of the discipline of International Relations, the collapse of the League of Nations dealt a fatal blow to Idealism. There is no doubt that the language of Liberalism after 1945 was more pragmatic; how could anyone living in the shadow of the Holocaust be optimistic? Yet familiar core ideas of Liberalism remained. Even in the early 1940s, there was recognition of the need to replace the League with another international institution with responsibility for international peace and security. Only this time, in the case of the United Nations there was an awareness among the framers of the Charter of the need for a consensus between the great powers

in order for enforcement action to be taken, hence the veto system (Article 27 of the UN Charter), which allowed any of the five permanent members of the Security Council the power of veto. This revision constituted an important modification to the classical model of collective security (Robert and Adeyemi 2016: 315). With the ideological polarity of the Cold War, the UN procedures for collective security were still-born (as either of the superpowers and their allies would veto any action proposed by the other). It was not until the end of the Cold War that a collective security system was put into operation, following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on 2 August 1990.

An important argument advanced by liberals in the early post-war period concerned the state's inability to cope with modernization. David Mitrany (1943), a pioneer integration theorist, argued that transnational cooperation was required in order to resolve common problems. His core concept was ramification, meaning the likelihood that cooperation in one sector would lead governments to extend the range of collaboration across other sectors. As states become more embedded in an integration process, the 'cost' of withdrawing from cooperative ventures increases.

This argument about the positive benefits from transnational cooperation is one which informed a new generation of scholars (particularly in the USA) in the 1960s and 1970s. Their argument was not simply about the mutual gains from trade, but that other transitional actors were beginning to challenge the dominance of sovereign states. World politics, according to pluralists (as they are often referred to) was no longer an exclusive arena for states, as it had been for the first three hundred years of the Westphalian states-system. In one of the central texts of this genre, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1972) argued that the centrality of other actors, such as interest groups, transnational corporations, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), had to be taken into consideration. Here the overriding image of international relations is one of a cobweb of diverse actors linked through multiple channels of interaction.

Although the phenomenon of transnationalism was an important addition to the international relations theorists' vocabulary, it remained underdeveloped as a theoretical concept. Perhaps the most important contribution of Pluralism was its elaboration of interdependence. Due to the expansion of capitalism and the emergence of a global culture, Pluralists recognized a growing interconnectedness in which 'changes in one part of the system have direct and

indirect consequences for the rest of the system' (Little 2006: 77). Absolute state autonomy, so keenly entrenched in the minds of state leaders, was being circumscribed by interdependence. Such a development brought with it enhanced potential for cooperation as well as increased levels of vulnerability.

In his 1979 work **Theory of International Politics**, the neo-realist Kenneth Waltz attacked the pluralist argument about the decline of the state. He argued that the degree of interdependence internationally was far lower than the constituent parts in a national political system. Moreover, the level of economic interdependence—especially between great powers—was less than that which existed in the early part of the twentieth century. Waltz concludes: 'if one is thinking of the international-political world, it is odd in the extreme that "interdependence" has become the world commonly used to describe it' (1979: 144). In the course of their engagement with Waltz and other neo-realists, early Pluralists modified their position. Neo-liberals, as they came to be known, conceded that the core assumptions of neo-realism were indeed correct: the anarchic international structure, the centrality of states, and a rationalist approach to social scientific inquiry. Where they differed was apparent primarily in the argument that anarchy does not mean durable patterns of cooperation are impossible: the creation of international regimes matters here as they facilitate cooperation by sharing information, reinforcing reciprocity, and making defection from norms easier to punish. Moreover, in what was to become the most important difference between neo-realists and neo-liberals, the latter argued that actors would enter into cooperative agreements if the gains were evenly shared. Neo-realists dispute this hypothesis: what matters is a question not so much of mutual gains as of relative gains: in other words, a neo-realist state has to be sure that it has more to gain than its rivals from a particular bargain or regime.

There are two important arguments that set neo-liberalism apart from democratic peace Liberalism and the liberal idealists of the inter-war period. First, academic inquiry should be guided by a commitment to a scientific approach to theory building. Whatever deeply held personal values scholars maintain, their task must be to observe regularities, formulate hypotheses as to why that relationship holds, and subject these to critical scrutiny. This separation of fact and value puts neo-liberals on the positivist side of the methodological divide. Second, writers such as Keohane are critical of the naïve assumption of nineteenth-century liberals that commerce breeds

peace. A free-trade system, according to Keohane, provides incentives for cooperation but does not guarantee it. Here he is making an important distinction between cooperation and harmony. ‘Cooperation is not automatic’, Keohane argues, ‘but requires planning and negotiation’ (1986: 11). In the following section we see how contemporary liberal thinking maintains that the institutions of world politics after 1945 successfully embedded all states into a cooperative order.

## **6. Realism, Liberalism and the Globalization of World Politics**

The paper opened by considering the often repeated realist claim that the pattern of international politics—wars interrupted for periods characterized by the preparation for future wars—have remained constant over the preceding twenty-five centuries. Realists have consistently held that the continuities in international relations are more important than the changes, but many find this to be increasingly problematic in the present age of globalization. But the importance of Realism has not been diminished by the dynamics of globalization. It is not clear that economic interdependence has made war less likely. The state continues to be the dominant unit in world politics. And globalization should not be seen as a process that is disconnected from the distribution of power in the international system. In this sense, this current phase of globalization is fundamentally tied to Westernization and, to be even more specific, Americanization.

Not surprisingly, leading realist thinkers have been quick to seize on the apparent convergence between our post-9/11 experience and the cycle of violence predicted by the theory. There were, however, some apparent contradictions in the realist account of the conflict. To begin with, the attacks on the US homeland were committed by a non-state actor. Had one of the significant norms of the Westphalian order become unhinged, namely, that war happens between sovereign states? Not only was the enemy a global network of Al Qaeda operatives, their goal was unconventional in that they did not seek to conquer territory but challenge by force the ideological supremacy of the West (Brown, Nartin and Rengger 2012). Set against these anomalies, the leading states in the system were quick to identify the network with certain territorial states—the Taliban government of Afghanistan being the most immediate example, but also other pariah states who allegedly harboured terrorists. The United States was quick to link the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq with its global war on terror. Moreover, rather than identifying the

terrorists as transnational criminals and using police enforcement methods to counter their threat, the USA and its allies defined them as enemies of the state who had to be targeted and defeated using conventional military means.

For realists such as John Gray and Kenneth Waltz, 9/11 was not the beginning of a new era in world politics so much as a case of ‘business as usual’ (see their essays in Booth and Dunne 2002). What matters most, argues Waltz, are the continuities in the structural imbalance of power in the system and the distribution of nuclear weapons. Crises are to be expected because the logic of self-help generates periodic crises. Their analysis is a stark rejoinder to the more idealist defenders of globalization who see a new pacific world order emerging out of the ashes of the previous order. According to realists, 9/11 was never going to trigger a new era in governance: the coalition of the willing that was forged in the immediate aftermath was, in Waltz’s terms, ‘a mile wide’, but only ‘an inch deep’. How prophetic those words have proven to be. The war against Iraq was executed by the USA with the UK being the only significant diplomatic and military ally. Not only did most states in the world oppose the war, leading American realists were public in their condemnation (Guzzini 2018). Iraq, they argued, could have been deterred from threatening both the security of the United States and its neighbours in the Middle East. Furthermore, a costly military intervention followed by a lengthy occupation in the Middle East has weakened the USA’s ability to contain the rising threat from China. In short, the Bush Presidency has not exercised power in a responsible and sensible manner.

Behind the rhetoric of universal values, the USA has used the war to justify a wide range of policy positions that strengthen its economic and military power while undermining various multilateral agreements on arms control, the environment, human rights, and trade.

Realists do not have to situate their theory of world politics in opposition to globalization per se; rather, what they offer is a very different conceptualization of the process. What is important about a realist view of globalization is the claim that rudimentary transnational governance is possible but at the same time it is entirely dependent on the distribution of power. Given the preponderance of power that the USA holds, it should not be a surprise that it has been one of the foremost proponents of globalization. The core values of globalization—liberalism, capitalism, and consumerism—are exactly those espoused by the

United States. At a deeper cultural level, realists argue that modernity is not, as liberals hope, dissolving the boundaries of difference among the peoples of the world. From classical realists such as Rousseau to structural realists such as Waltz, protagonists have argued that interdependence is as likely to breed 'mutual vulnerability' as peace and prosperity. And while questioning the extent to which the world has become any more interdependent in relative terms, realists insist that the state is not going to be eclipsed by global forces operating either below or above the nation-state. Nationalism, realists have continuously reminded us, remains a potent force in world politics.

When applying liberal ideas to international relations today, we find two clusters of responses to the problems and possibilities posed by globalization. Before outlining these, let us briefly return to the definition of Liberalism set out at greater length earlier, the four components being: juridical equality, democracy, liberty, and the free market. As we will see below, these same values can be pursued by very different political strategies.

The first alternative is that of the Liberalism of privilege (Richardson 2017: 18). According to this perspective, the problems of globalization need to be addressed by a combination of strong democratic states in the core of the international system, robust regimes, and open markets and institutions. For an example of the working out of such a strategy in practice, we need to look no further than the success of the liberal hegemony of the post-1945 era. The US writer, G. John Ikenberry, is an articulate defender of this liberal order. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the USA took the opportunity to 'embed' certain fundamental liberal principles into the regulatory rules and institutions of international society. Most importantly, and contrary to Realist thinking, the USA chose to forsake short-run gains in return for a durable settlement that benefited all states. According to Ikenberry, the USA signaled the cooperative basis of its power in a number of ways. First, in common with liberal democratic principles, the USA was an example to other members of international society in so far as its political system is open and allows different voices to be heard. Foreign policy, like domestic policy, is closely scrutinized by the media, public opinion, and political committees and opposition parties. Second, the USA advocated a global free-trade regime in accordance with the idea that free trade brings benefits to all participants (it also has the added advantage, from the hegemon's point of view, of being cheap to manage). Third, the USA appeared to its allies at least as a reluctant

hegemon that would not seek to exploit its significant power-political advantage. Fourth, and most importantly, the USA created and participated in a range of important international institutions that constrained its actions. The Bretton Woods system of economic and financial accords and the NATO security alliance are the best examples of the highly institutionalized character of American power in the post-1945 period. Advocates of this liberal hegemonic order note wryly that it was so successful that allies were more worried about abandonment than domination.

The post-1945 system of regulatory regimes and institutions has been successful in part due to the fact that they exist. In other words, once one set of institutional arrangements becomes embedded it is very difficult for alternatives to make inroads (Baldwin 2013). There are two implications that need to be teased out here. One is the narrow historical 'window' that exists for new institutional design; the other is the durability of existing institutions. 'In terms of American hegemony, this means that, short of a major war or a global economic collapse, it is very difficult to envisage the type of historical breakpoint needed to replace the existing order' (Ikenberry 2009: 137).

Let us accept for a moment that the neo-liberal argument is basically correct: the post-1945 international order has been successful and durable because US hegemony has been of a liberal character. The logic of this position is one of institutional conservatism. In order to respond effectively to global economic and security problems, there is no alternative to working within the existing institutional structure. This is a manifesto for managing an international order in which the Western states who paid the start-up costs of the institutions are now experiencing significant returns on their institutional investment (Grieco 2017). At the other end of the spectrum, the current order is highly unresponsive to the needs of weaker states and peoples. According to the United Nations Development Programme, the resulting global inequality is 'grotesque'. One statistic is particularly graphic: the richest 20 per cent of the world's population holds three-quarters of the income, the poorest 20 per cent receive only 1.5 per cent.

Given that Liberalism has produced such unequal gains for the West and the rest, it is not surprising that the hegemonic power has become obsessed with the question of preserving and extending its control of institutions, markets, and resources. When this hegemonic liberal order comes under challenge, as it

did on 9/11, the response is uncompromising. It is noticeable in this respect that President George W. Bush mobilized the language of Liberalism against Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and also Iraq. He referred to the 2003 war against Iraq as 'freedom's war' and the term 'liberation' is frequently used by defenders of 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'.

Given the primacy of the neo-conservative ideology underpinning the Bush presidency, one needs to proceed with caution when advancing the claim that many liberal principles underpin contemporary American foreign policy. Nevertheless, the official discourse of US foreign policy overlaps in interesting ways with a number of liberal values and ideas (Rhodes 2013), as can be seen in Bush's speech at the West Point graduation ceremony in June 2002. A key opening theme in the speech is how force can be used for freedom: 'we fight, as we always fight, for a just peace'. Bush then goes on to locate this argument in historical context. Prior to the twenty-first century, great power competition manifested itself in war. Today, 'the Great Powers share common values' such as 'a deep commitment to human freedom'. In his State of the Union address of 2004, he even declared that 'our aim is a democratic peace'.

The potential for Liberalism to embrace imperialism is a tendency that has a long history (Doyle 2006: 1151-69). We find in Machiavelli a number of arguments for the necessity for republics to expand. Liberty increases wealth and the concomitant drive for new markets; soldiers who are at the same time citizens are better fighters than slaves or mercenaries; and expansion is often the best means to promote a state's security. In this sense, contemporary US foreign policy is no different from the great expansionist republican states of the pre-modern period such as Athens and Rome. Few liberals today would openly advocate imperialism although the line between interventionist strategies to defend liberal values and privileges and imperialism is very finely drawn. Michael Doyle advocated a policy mix of forcible and non-forcible instruments that ought to be deployed in seeking regime change in illiberal parts of the world.

This strategy of preserving and extending liberal institutions is open to a number of criticisms. For the sake of simplicity, these will be gathered up into an alternative to the Liberalism of privilege that we will call radical Liberalism. An opening objection made by proponents of the latter concerns the understanding of Liberalism embodied in the neo-liberal defence of international institutions. The liberal character of those institutions is assumed

rather than subjected to critical scrutiny (Grieco 2017). As a result, the incoherence of the purposes underpinning these institutions is often overlooked. The kind of economic liberalization advocated by Western financial institutions, particularly in economically impoverished countries, frequently comes into conflict with the norms of democracy and human rights. Three examples illustrate this dilemma. First, the more the West becomes involved in the organization of developing states' political and economic infrastructure, the less those states are able to be accountable to their domestic constituencies, thereby cutting through the link between the government and the people which is so central to modern liberal forms of representative democracy (Hurrell and Woods 2005: 463). Second, in order to qualify for Western aid and loans, states are often required to meet harsh economic criteria requiring cuts in many welfare programmes; the example of the poorest children in parts of Africa having to pay for primary school education (Booth and Dunne 2009: 310)—which is their right according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—is a stark reminder of the fact that economic liberty and political equality are frequently opposed. Third, the inflexible response of international financial institutions to various crises in the world-economy has contributed to a backlash against Liberalism per se. Richard Falk put this dilemma starkly: there is, he argues, a tension between 'the ethical imperatives of the global neighbourhood and the dynamics of economic globalization' (1995a: 573). Radical liberals argue that the hegemonic institutional order has fallen prey to the neo-liberal consensus which minimizes the role of the public sector in providing for welfare, and elevates the market as the appropriate mechanism for allocating resources, investment, and employment opportunities.

A second line of critique pursued by radical liberals concerns not so much the contradictory outcomes but the illiberal nature of the regimes and institutions. To put the point bluntly, there is a massive democratic deficit at the global level. Issues of international peace and security are determined by only 15 members of international society, of whom only five can exercise a power of veto. In other words, it is hypothetically possible for up to 200 states in the world to believe that military action ought to be taken but such an action would contravene the UN Charter if one of the permanent members was to cast a veto. If we take the area of political economy, the power exerted by the West and its international financial institutions perpetuates structural inequality. A good example here is the issue of free trade, which the West has pushed in areas where it gains from an open

policy (such as in manufactured goods and financial services) but resisted in areas that it stands to lose (agriculture and textiles). At a deeper level, radical liberals worry that all statist models of governance are undemocratic as elites are notoriously self-serving (Smith 2018).

These sentiments underpin the approach to globalization taken by writers such as Danielle Archibugi, David Held, Mary Kaldor, and Jan Aart Scholte, among others, who believe that global politics must be democratized (Held and McGrew 2012). Held's argument is illustrative of the analytical and prescriptive character of radical Liberalism in an era of globalization. His diagnosis begins by revealing the inadequacies of the 'Westphalian order' (or the modern states-system which is conventionally dated from the middle of the seventeenth century). During the latter stages of this period, we have witnessed rapid democratization in a number of states, but this has not been accompanied by democratization of the society of states (Held 2003). This task is increasingly urgent given the current levels of interconnectedness, since 'national' governments are no longer in control of the forces which shape their citizens' lives (for example, the decision by one state to permit deforestation has environmental consequences for all states). After 1945, the UN Charter set limits to the sovereignty of states by recognizing the rights of individuals in a whole series of human rights conventions (Cox, Ikenberry and Inoguchi 2000: 1-17). But even if the UN had lived up to its Charter in the post-1945 period, it would still have left the building blocks of the Westphalian order largely intact, namely: the hierarchy between great powers and the rest (symbolized by the permanent membership of the Security Council); massive inequalities of wealth between states; and a minimal role for non-state actors to influence decision-making in international relations.

In place of the Westphalian and UN models, Held outlines a cosmopolitan model of democracy. This requires, in the first instance, the creation of regional parliaments and the extension of the authority of such regional bodies (like the European Union) which are already in existence. Second, human rights conventions must be entrenched in national parliaments and monitored by a new International Court of Human Rights. Third, reform of the UN, or the replacement of it, with a genuinely democratic and accountable global parliament. Without appearing to be too sanguine about the prospects for the realization of the cosmopolitan model of democracy, Held is nevertheless adamant that if

democracy is to thrive, it must penetrate the institutions and regimes which manage global politics.

Radical liberals place great importance on the civilizing capacity of global society. While the rule of law and the democratization of international institutions is a core component of the liberal project, it is also vital that citizens' networks are broadened and deepened to monitor and cajole these institutions. These groups form a linkage between individuals, states, and global institutions. It is easy to portray radical liberal thinking as 'utopian' but we should not forget the many achievements of global civil society so far. The evolution of international humanitarian law, and the extent to which these laws are complied with, is largely down to the millions of individuals who are active supporters of human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (Falk 2005: 164). Similarly, global protest movements have been responsible for the heightened sensitivity to environmental degradation everywhere.

This emphasis on what Richard Falk calls 'globalization from below' is an important antidote to neo-liberalism's somewhat status quo-oriented worldview (Walker and Abiodun 2019: 112). But just as imperialism can emerge from a complacent Liberalism of privilege, the danger for radical liberals is naivety. How is it that global institutions can be reformed in such a way that the voices of ordinary people will be heard? And what if the views of 'peoples' rather than 'states' turn out to be similarly indifferent to global injustice? There is a sense in which radical liberal thought wants to turn back the clock of globalization to an era in which local producers cooperated to produce socially responsible food in the day and wove baskets or watched street theatre in the evening. It is not clear that such an organic lifestyle is preferable to purchasing relatively inexpensive goods from a multinational supermarket outlet or finding entertainment on multichannel television. Perhaps the least plausible aspect of the radical liberal project is the injunction to reform global capitalism. Just how much of a civilizing effect is global civil society able to exert upon the juggernaut of capitalism? And can this movement bridge the globalization divide in which democratic institutions are territorially located while forces of production and destruction are global?

## 7. Conclusion

There are good reasons for thinking that the twenty-first century will be a realist century. Despite efforts of federalists to rekindle the idealist flame, Europe

continues to be as divided by different national interests as it is united by a common good. As Jacques Chirac put it in 2000, a 'united Europe of states' was much more likely than a 'United States of Europe'. Outside Europe and North America, many of the assumptions which underpinned the post-war international order, particularly those associated with human rights, are increasingly being seen as nothing more than a Western idea backed by economic dollars and military 'divisions'. If China continues its rate of economic growth, it will be more economically powerful than the USA by 2030 (Adekson 2019: 398). By then, realism leads us to predict, that Western norms of individual rights and responsibilities will be under threat. Rather than transforming global politics in its own image, as Liberalism has sought to do in the twentieth century, the West may need to become more realist in order for its traditions and values to survive the twenty-first.

The euphoria with which Liberals greeted the end of the Cold War in 1989 has dissipated to a large extent by 9/11 and the war on terror. The pattern of conflict and insecurity that we have seen at the beginning of the twenty-first century suggests that liberal democracy remains at best an incomplete project (Paul and Hall 2019). Images and narratives from countries in every continent—Afghanistan, Liberia, Chechnya, Columbia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Myanmar, Zimbabwe, and so on—remind us that in many parts of the world, anti-liberal values of warlordism, torture, intolerance and injustice are daily occurrences. Moreover, the reasons why these states have failed can to some extent be laid at the door of liberalism, particularly in terms of its promotion of often irreconcilable norms of sovereignty, democracy, national self-determination, and human rights (Hoffmann 1995-6: 169).

A deeper reason for the crisis in Liberalism is that it is bound up with an increasingly discredited Enlightenment view of the world. Contrary to the hopes of Bentham, Hume, Kant, Mill, and Paine, the application of reason and science to politics has not brought communities together. Indeed, it has arguably shown the fragmented nature of the political community, which is regularly expressed in terms of ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences. Critics of Liberalism argue that the universalizing mission of liberal values, such as democracy, capitalism, and secularism, undermines the traditions and practices of non-Western cultures (Gray 2015: 146). When it comes to doing inter-cultural politics, somehow Liberals just don't seem to take 'no' for an answer.

The Marxist writer Immanuel Wallerstein has a nice way of expressing the dilemma over universalism. Liberals view it as 'a "gift" of the powerful to the weak' which places them in a double bind: 'to refuse the gift is to lose; to accept the gift is to lose' (in Brown 2009).

At the outset, the paper pointed to a tension within Liberalism. The emphasis on personal liberty, unfettered trade, and the accumulation of property can lend itself to a society riven with inequality, suspicion, and rivalry. Pulling in the opposite direction, Liberalism contains within it a set of values that seek to provide for the conditions of a just society through democratic institutions and welfare-oriented economies. Projecting this tension on to a global stage leads to two possibilities for Liberalism in an era of globalization. The neo-liberal variant is one where relatively weak institutions try to respond to the challenge of coordinating the behaviour of states in a decentralized international order. In this world economic growth is unevenly distributed. As a consequence, preventive military action remains an ever-present possibility in order to deal with chaos and violence produced by dispossessed communities and networks. The more progressive model, advocated by radical liberals, seeks to heighten regulation through the strengthening of international institutions. This is to be done by making institutions more democratic and accountable for the negative consequences of globalization. The charge of utopianism is one that is easy to make against this position and hard to refute. In so doing, liberals of a radical persuasion should invoke Kant's axiom that 'ought' must imply 'can'.

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