

# Foundations and Principles of National Security: Goals and Objectives in the Realist Theoretical Tradition

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## Classical Realism and its Assumptions

For a very long period of time, Classical Realism has been the cardinal theory of international relations. Other theories have come into existence as explicit disagreements with Realism, thus proving its paradigmatic status. The school of Realism, whether one reads Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes, or Henry Kissinger, remains more or less the same. Its assumptions are its weak points, since, as axioms, they are clearly oversimplifications and hence, open to challenge.

The primary assumption of Realism derives from Thomas Hobbes and his atomistic school of human action. In Hobbes' state of nature, human beings are quite simple creatures. They are isolated from each other and are mutually repellant. Prior to the erection of the state, human beings are egocentric and self-interested in the most vulgar of ways. This conception has the advantage of simplicity. States, human beings or corporations seek to expand their power as widely as they can until a greater force counteracts this irresistible drive.<sup>1</sup>

The Classical Realist school also assumes that the world has only one important actor: the state. The state is seen as a unitary entity, making decisions on the same foundation as the individual in the state of nature might. In fact, this conception of Realism is identical to the state of nature, since there is no governing power, law or constraint upon the egocentric drives of each actor except the power of other actors. The distinction between Hobbes and Realist international theory is that Hobbes did not countenance the existence of alliances. People were alone in their drives for power.<sup>2</sup>

Deriving from this premise, it is equally clear that all international issues are resolved by force or the threat thereof. There are no universally shared ideals that can be appealed to, and to be sure, mere survival is hardly an ideal. Bacteria have the same imperative. Given the above, there are also no universally accepted moral rules in this anarchic construct. What moral norms that might be current stem directly from the desire of a hegemon to either gain power or justify power already gained. They are cynical tools that serve the only end possible: power, defined as military security against the threat of encroachment.

Probably the most programmatic statement of Realism comes from the infamous Hans Morgenthau. His "Six Postulates" of Realism largely define the debate. These Six Principles are:

1. Self-interest is defined as a drive to enhance security at the expense of others.
2. State decisions are informed by this identical concept.
3. Power is a category that is objectively valid and, in general, remains the same.
4. Morality takes a back seat to successful statecraft.
5. Any international system, but especially the balance of power, derives from that single variable: rational self-interest means security, and security is power.
6. Ethics does matter, but only secondarily. This is distinct from Hobbes, where his hypothetical human race is little more than bestial.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Hobbes, Thomas (1660) *Leviathan*, Edwin Curley, ed. Hackett, 1994, 19ff

2 Hobbes, 1660: ch 13, entire

3 Morgenthau, H. (1954) *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 2nd ed. Knopf, 4-12

Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979) is a restatement of the Classical school against the rise of liberal idealism. Like most realist approaches, Waltz's is concerned with Occam's Razor, that is, the superiority of models with fewer variables than those with more. Waltz's specific contribution is in the hierarchy of elements that create a model efficacious for prediction.

One aspect of his argument is that, regardless of the ideological or institutional distinctions among states, they all seem to act in the same basic way. This approach is called "Neorealism" and seeks to place the Classical school on more scientifically defensible grounds. He does this, firstly, by taking the international system as foundational. This sets the parameters for state action. The whole must exist before the parts. The hierarchy looks like this:

1. The nature of the system as a whole, that is, the specific principle(s) by which it is organized. For Waltz, predictably, the "system" is not a system at all, since it is anarchic. However, the lack of overarching rules can be conducive to creating a system such as hegemonic rule or bipolarity.
2. From this is deduced the specific units, or the actors themselves. Again, not differing from the Classical tradition, this is the state, seen as a unitary organization with a will. It should be noted that Waltz holds that non-state actors such as multinational corporations and media outlets must also be taken into consideration.
3. The distribution of power within the system is the third element. This, more than anything else, sets Neorealism apart from its Classical forebears. In this case, the state in the system is identical to all others only in the formal capacity that it is unified and that it seeks security. Since power capabilities are unequally distributed, in this way are states different from one another.<sup>4</sup>

In his (1990) article in the *Journal of International Affairs*, Waltz responds to his critics by detailing the ways that his approach differs from Morgenthau's. First, the methodological distinction is that the system is an actor in its own right, and states within it must be differentiated from the current distribution of power relations among countries.

Second, power and security must be differentiated. Power is a means to security. Security can be enhanced by increased power or vitiated because of it. For example, a state might have a tremendous military force out of proportion to its size or relative importance to the system. Yet, this is not a good thing, since other states will react and build their own offensive capabilities. In this way can having a tremendous amount of power reduce security as a direct result.

One example here might be Syria during the Cold War. A relatively poor country, Soviet aid permitted Damascus to amass an impressive amount of military power against Israel. The only thing this accomplished was to give Damascus a sense of confidence it had no right to have. Israel's American equipment proved far superior to the Soviet time and again, leading to the repeated humiliation of Syria. In this case, building up military power from the USSR destroyed Syria's security and forced her to relinquish territory.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the nature of the system is the primary actor in the sense that it sets the parameters for action. Only once this has been understood can the decisions of the states within that system make sense.<sup>6</sup> This last difference with the Classical school is highly significant. In research, these must be distinguished. If a balance of power exists, then the

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4 Waltz, Kenneth (1979). *Theory of International Politics*. McGraw: 92-95

5 AIPAC (2013). *Military Threat to Israel: Syria*. The Virtual Jewish Library

6 Waltz, Kenneth. (1990). *Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory*. *The Journal of International Affairs* 44(1), 36

decisions of states within that system will be different if the global order was one based on economic domination. The European order prior to World War I is a classic illustration, since each empire sought to maximize its security at the expense of the opposing alliance. Alliances formed due to the desire of security through power, and combination against enemies was the best way to do this. The resultant war not only was illogical from the point of view of security, but these regimes collapsed altogether.<sup>7</sup>

Waltz's criticism of Morgenthau does not deviate from Realism except in two senses: first, that the system generated by states under anarchy is the fundamental actor that needs to be grasped logically prior to the actions of states. Secondly, states are not seen as uniform because power is not evenly distributed. In the World War I example, alliances were defined since weaker states needed the sponsorship of the stronger, e.g. Bulgaria needed Germany. It is this conception of power that makes Waltz's views more interesting.

### **Epistemology and National Security Studies**

Epistemology is simply the general field that deals with how we know things. For national security issues, the literature here is huge. Primarily, epistemological issues derive from the basic approach we take to the field. For example, Realism stresses the role of the state as the sole provider of military security in any given system of states. It seeks an equilibrium and balance of power to maintain some tolerable peace. Realism stresses a simple logic of military power and security where the gain for one country is a loss for all others, even purported allies.

On the other hand, idealism stresses the role of human rights – peace is far more than the absence of war, but is the promotion of basic public goods for all the world's peoples. It also does not rely entirely on the state, but many super-state and sub-state actors all have their place in the broader complex of social and economic actors.

The broader point is that our knowledge of national security begins with a set of axioms. Here, we begin from the point of view that the state is not going away in international relations. This is not identical with a realist position, but only that the super-national experiments such as the EU are undergoing a great level of strain.

As the examples of China and Russia prove, the state has not diminished, but in fact has grown. While banks and productive capital is highly mobile, the state is not without weapons to extract resources from these areas. In larger states with powerful militaries and diplomatic clout, the state can and does place its stamp on the local economy.<sup>8</sup>

How one defines security then dictates which basic approach one will take. Human rights are a part of realist political theory at least in the sense that the abuse thereof can excuse military action against them. The forms of international relations are not mutually exclusive, but they differ in what they emphasize.

In this case, we can make a preliminary argument that the greater the amount of trade between two countries, the less likely war will break out between them. If this is true, then forestalling war is a matter of increasing bi- and multilateral trade with the country and region. Creating these webs of dependency may make war too expensive to pursue. This does not favor either idealism or realism, but does define security in more or less military terms. Trade just makes the use of military forces less likely.

### **The Literature**

In this particular area, older studies are as important as are more recent research. This

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7 Papayouanou, PA (1996). Interdependence, Institutions, and the Balance of Power: Britain, Germany, and World War I. *International Security*, 20(4), 50-55

8 Haftendorn, H. The Security Puzzle: Theory-Building and Discipline-Building in International Security. *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35/1 (1991), 3-17

is because the realist notion of international security (that is, US security in a global context) has been around for a long time. For example, Harold J. Barnett's (1958) work stresses the importance of marshaling natural resources for the sake of being able to weather a war of attrition, or, in the concern of the day, an all out nuclear conflict. In this case, natural resources are a zero-sum game, where one state to corner the market on a specific good, such as oil or bauxite (to make aluminum) has a strategic advantage over other states. In this case, realism has a new lease on life, since power is more than military clout, since resources are a big part of the development of a modern military machine.

Charles Burton Marshall's (1976) article is one of definition, and it claims that "National security signifies the existence of conditions warranting strong expectations of the American people's continuity into a long future as a nation organized through institutions of government sustained by their allegiance and capable of effecting the linked purposes enunciated in the preamble of the Constitution." This is important because it situates national security studies in the context of a Constitution. It deals with the long term sense of safety that permits economic development without fear of war. Thomas Hobbes' famed "war of all against all" destroys any incentive to development. The absence of peace, in other words, damages the desire to build and create. National security in this context, therefore, means that the basic economic life of a society can look to the long term for its development. Without the military security so important to the Realists, other goods cannot develop. This is one of the strengths of the state-centered approach to national security. Security is the overarching public aim because it permits all other aims to have a chance of succeeding.

Louis Morton's (1963) paper does the same thing, except he stresses the role of area studies. This means that any serious approach to national security must go beyond the "Realist" concerns of the local society and focus on different areas in a specialized way. In the 1980s, it was the Soviet Union; in 2012, it might be the Middle East. Wherever there are problems that interest policymakers, there must be a phalanx of specialists that can provide expert advice. This is particularly the case in places like Central Asia whose oil and gas wealth are essential to American prosperity. In this case, widespread ignorance of Uzbek language and culture is a problem. Making sense out of a state's motivation goes beyond the typical Realist approach of military security, because it is culturally situated. Local rulers must respond to local pressures. If we do not understand those pressures, we cannot develop a coherent policy.

Kal J. Holsti's (1986) paper deals with the role of international trade flows as a national security issue. This is an area that is essential to the field that only in the last 20 or 30 years has come into its own. Credit is a clear problem here, and is one of those areas that kicks the state out of international affairs (for the time being). Credit is based on private, multinational banks that set the standard for what counts as economic development. Nothing has changed here, except that countries like China, who have a state bank, have had no shortage of economic growth indicators. Hence, China may well be an example of how the state can be "brought back in" to international trade. The fact is that international banking and money markets are as much about national security as guns and tanks.

More importantly, the entire question of international trade is connected to the present problems in the international order. While powerful banks, operating internationally, have huge resources at their disposal, the rise of China shows that state banks still exist, and have a future, especially if the international order breaks down. If it does, then finance and economics will become more state centered than ever.

William G. Shepherd's (1988) work is in this same vein. His concern is the state within an internationalized economic order. Shepherd still sees some neo-mercantilist approaches to international trade, again showing China's state bank as an important indicator of state power. The state can marshal its own resources to finance local development. China's

success (as of 2012) is proof of that. Also as of 2012, the struggles of the EU relative to credit is another example that shows how fragile these super-state organizations are. For our modern life, Shepherd's older work still holds – the state remains a powerful actor in international economics.

The concept of "neo-mercantilism" is based around the preeminence of the state in international economics. Examples such as Russia and China, as well as the Islamic banking movement, shows that cultural and ethnic nationalism does have a role in finance. Islamic banking, Hugo Chavez's Bank of the South in Latin America, and the financial resources of the non-aligned movement all show that the state is not quite dead in international economics, and might well be making a comeback.

Stephen M. Walt's (1991) work is also one of definition. It takes into account all areas of security, economic and idealist approaches included. The broader point here is that national security is not based on one discipline. Economics, history and political science all have their role. Area studies, stressed already, is itself multidisciplinary. There is really no consensus on the definition or scope of national security, though there is a basic set of parameters that can be used to situate both the discipline itself and recent research on the topic.

Writing at the end of the Cold War, Walt states: "Security studies remains an interdisciplinary enterprise, but its earlier preoccupation with nuclear issues has broadened to include topics such as grand strategy, conventional warfare, and the domestic sources of international conflict, among others" (Walt, 1991). This foundational statement is not controversial, since all approaches to international security, as of 2012, have broadened their approach. The older Realist idea, however, is not dead, but rather has been enhanced with other variables.

Christopher P. Twomey's (2007) work brings it all together. Using China has his main variable and actor, he stresses that both economic and military interests have been important in defining US-China relations. His argument is that the US has missed many opportunities to take advantage of China's rise to prominence while "managing" her economic success.

This gamut of older and newer literature is all meant to situate the basic approach of this paper -- the rise of the state in international politics. Even among the Gulf States, a strong, state-centered Islamic banking movement has taken off. The Gulf states have been able to centralize finance among themselves due to their low populations and oil revenues. This oil--as well as Islamic nationalism--have rendered the Gulf states far less dependent on foreign sources of revenue. Islamic banking might also have a strong role in localizing of "regionalizing" international finance.

### **Variables in Realist Theory**

Certain variables, such as ideological concerns with "American exceptionalism," are very tough to operationalize. Operationalization is the method of taking a variable, such as public sentiment, and attaching a number to it. Depending on the variable, this can be a challenge. Yet, variables such as "patriotism" cannot be ignored as a matter of policy, since both the historical and modern approaches to America's role in the world will have an impact on a) whether or not the US will become involved in a domestic dispute in Africa, say, and b) whether this involvement will be accepted by the bulk of the voting population. America's involvement in Somalia in the early 1990s might be understood as stemming from a) America's security interest in the maritime trade of the area, as well as b) the concept that the US has a right to enforce certain basic norms in foreign conflict (a right that other states do not share). While most would stress the dollars and cents at issue (since Somalia juts out to the sea, facing the Middle East), exceptionalism cannot be ignored as a (partial) causal variable.<sup>9</sup>

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9 These examples need not be treated in detail, they are meant to illustrate the more general point.

Other variables might be easier to grasp. Whether a country is strategic to American interest is one that is easier to operationalize. We can make sense out of Somalia due to the oil trade. The US has armed the Georgian republic in its fight against Russia because Georgia is an important pipeline route bringing oil from the Caspian Sea. The same might be said about the Balkans or even “South Sudan.” It seems that the easier a variable is to operationalize, the more important and significant it seems to be.

More specifically, we can use events like the collapse of the Greek or Icelandic banking system to hypothesize that the state is now reforming its presence in the international economy. If the EU takes a financial hit, this may well mean that the state will take more direct action in regulating the money markets and credit of the local economy.<sup>10</sup>

In our case, we can easily take the examples of China or Russia to show that the state is not quite dead as a matter of national security. The very existence of American military bases around the world, centered around strategic areas such as Somalia, shows that basic ideology—as well as economic sense—still motivates US military policy, and hence, defines what counts as a national security threat.

The development of a hypothesis can be taken directly from the recent and historical research already examined. While only a small (yet diverse) sample of the historical literature in this field, we can use research from and after the Cold War to make sense out of the modern international arena. For our purposes, we can take the state as the beginning and end of international security, stressing the collapse of the EU and the rise of China as examples of how the state remains the central actor in global politics. American exceptionalism and the desire to intervene abroad can be another set of examples that back the hypothesis that the state remains powerful and might well become more so.<sup>11</sup>

The rise of the state (or the re-introduction of the state) in international politics and economics is not amenable to a strictly statistical approach; such an approach would be out of place. In general, the rise of the state will be described in papers and news reports showing state activity in economic mobilization, infrastructure and even finance. China and Belarus have state banks, Russia has a private bank, but it is closely bound to Putin's elite. The Gulf States have largely invested their oil money in many projects worldwide for when the oil runs out. The point is that many countries and regions are becoming less (not more) dependent on the international financial system.

In dealing with national security, different methods can and should be used. The qualitative approach is one that deals primarily with description. That is the main concern of this present proposal, since it seeks to take world events and fit it into the historical and modern literature in the field.

Defining the variables is the first set of goals, while placing these variables in an explanatory matrix is the second set. In most cases, a good research agenda will, in the very definition of variables, will show (or at least hint) at where the research can lead. State-centeredness is far more a qualitative approach, though there is no reason why quantitative methods might not have their role.<sup>12</sup>

In dealing with the economic elements of national security, qualitative questions and variables will be significant. Dollars and cents are easy to operationalize. We can hypothesize for example, that the desire of the US to intervene abroad will fall as the country gets more in

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10 This does not automatically mean that integration will stop – it is just that it might be geared more towards local, state centered, needs than at present.

11 Holsti, K.J. *Politics in Command: Foreign Trade as National Security Policy*. International Organization, 40/3 (1986), 643-671

12 Haftendorn, H. *The Security Puzzle: Theory-Building and Discipline-Building in International Security*. *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35/1 (1991), 3-17; for a broader view of this approach to building and proving theories.

debt. This may well lead to the emergence of local power centers (that is, local hegemon) abroad taking up the slack.

Taking one example, the US will slowly pare down its presence in Korea as debt increases. South Korea is a strong and wealthy country that is more than capable of defending itself from its impoverished neighbor to the north. In China, the relations between Taiwan and the PRC are being defined in economic, as much as military, terms. Both countries are (illegally) trading with each other briskly, making war less likely and the American naval presence in that area less necessary. A war with the PRC today would be disastrous, both militarily and financially, as the US is both overstretched and broke. American exceptionalism in this case will not be sufficient to justify a naval or air presence in these potential hot spots, especially as China grows in strength and power.<sup>13</sup> Twomey states in this regard:

One might enmesh a potential adversary in an environment so thoroughly that it reshapes the adversary's interests. This component is particularly important given the nature of the Sino-American relationship: an ongoing shift in relative power. China's rise will increase its ability to challenge the international system. However, it will be less likely to do so the more it is enmeshed in the existing international order, because its leaders will perceive the order as serving Chinese interests. Furthermore, the creation of ties to the existing order will clarify Chinese challenges to the international system, if they come, by serving as litmus tests for judging Chinese behavior.<sup>14</sup>

This citation helps clarify some variables and ideas here. The idea of a) the state within b) an international order with the aim of c) preventing war brings this entire proposal and project to a head. The basic argument is simple and compelling: the greater the ties among states (especially powerful ones) the more expensive war would be. The basic concept is that the best of relations is based on trade, and trade can be used to a) influence the rise of the partner, in this case China, while b) preventing war.

The relationship with Taiwan is equally important, since trade between the two states (though they deny this) has reached epic proportions, making war potentially very expensive. What sort of desire for war will there be with China and the ROC if there are many cross-border business ventures? This, needless to say, is important for the US because of the American naval presence between the two countries.

It also should be noted that Twomey's approach above is generalizable. That is, it is a model that can be used for any major threat to the US (or the broader international system). The point is that trade becomes the main weapon. The US has the resources and the market to be a global power even without a military presence. The incentives for war with the US will go down to the extent that mutual and fair investment across borders becomes a reality.

### **Making Comparisons**

If we are to stress the role of the state in security, then comparing different states, state systems and policy options becomes indispensable. The above approach to China should be instructive: the basic hypothesis is that the extent to which trade increases, the likelihood of war decreases. One can form a research project that, among other things, uses time series

<sup>13</sup> The broader point is that China's "social market" might be a way to harness the power of markets for more "state-centered" concerns. It can take the good out of both markets and the role of the state into a new synthesis. This may be the road to a future, "democratic" peace without the stress on international organization.

<sup>14</sup> Twomey, C.P. Missing Strategic Opportunity in U.S. China Policy since 9/11: Grasping Tactical Success. *Asian Survey*, 47/4 (2007), 539

analysis to discover whether or not trade and peace co-vary, with all other things being equal.

If national security is meant to enhance (and ensure) peace, then this basic approach is important. The EU is another example: there has been no open fighting in Europe since 1945 among the major countries. Despite many differences, this might be the result of the continual integration of these economies. Of course, the problem is that if the state is reviving as a result of the present struggles of the Greek money markets, then this peace might be harmed. On the other hand, it might not be a contradiction to claim that the rise of state independence will continue to promote economic integration, only that local regulations will seek to focus FDI into channels that benefit the host government. The (re)formation of the state system does not imply that war is more likely. It only implies that the patterns of international investment might change.

Dina A. Zinnes' (2004) work is a largely quantitative approach to the so-called "democratic peace." This thesis is important, and it has been mentioned already: that democracies do not go to war against each other. This might be because these democracies are also capitalist, and have their economies partly integrated.<sup>15</sup> It might be a "market peace" rather than a "democratic" one. Here, the fact that the cost of violence is high becomes the main causal variable. On the one hand, wars have to go before the voters while, on the other, integrated economies have to deal with the threat of billions in losses under a protracted war.

This may be a spurious relationship in that the conditions that make democracies to thrive might be the same which lead to peace – increased trade and cross border profit-making. The rise of the "middle class" to democratic politics (the very essence of modernity) might be the conditions needed for peace – trade means a higher cost of war and hence a better chance of peace). And when a country like China sees its future within an open international order, the costs of war increase as well.

### **Conclusions**

The basic approach here is to re-situate the state in national security studies. The examples that can potentially be used are many, but China will do well as the main example, since she has a) seen a great degree of state-centered growth, b) has a state controlled central bank and c) is a major security issue for the US.

The state is a very broad variable in politics. It is not alone (as in the realist tradition), and must share power with other actors such as NGOs or corporations. However, as the EU crisis seems to suggest, states might be making a reentry in international affairs to take a dominant position over international and internationalist institutions. The rise of the state need not increase the chances for war, but international economics, financed by local and regional banks, may still remain international. Regional hegemons, in other words, will partner with more internationalist organizations for the sake of keeping more of the product and cash at home. The nature of efficiency in international economics need not be vitiated by the reintroduction of the state, only the product of economic production will be kept at home, rather than dispersed abroad. Islamic banking is doing just that, as these regional institutions grow in power and liquidity.

The greater the trade between the US and China (not to mention the ROC as well) will increase the chances for peace. According to the "democratic peace" theory (which militates against Realism), the strides China makes towards full democracy will also ensure a lack of warfare between these two giants, the PRC and the USA. From the American point of view, war with China would be a disaster, given the stretched out nature of American military

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<sup>15</sup> It may also be the case that democracies cannot be command economies, and, over time, all capitalist countries become democratic in one way or another. If this is true, then political and economic variables would be the same.

commitments. Some paring down might be needed overall, but the development of democracy in China is important in making sure that the peace is a real one once US ships have left the area. The politicians might want war when the middle classes do not.

The general notion here is that the state can be brought back into national security studies without rejecting the needs of comparative advantage in global economics. Economic efficiency and the gains of a rational trade policy are as much part of national security as guns and tanks, and no one in the literature takes issue with this. Realism is important and will not go away as the basic axiom of national security. It will, however, have to make room for other actors in its calculations.

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