CHAPTER 3

Realism

▌ Summary

This chapter sketches the realist tradition in IR. The chapter takes note of an important dichotomy in realist thought between classical realism and strategic as well as structural approaches to realism. Classical realists emphasize the normative aspects of realism as well as the empirical aspects. Most realists today pursue a social scientific analysis of the structures and processes of world politics, but they are inclined to ignore norms and values. The chapter discusses both classical and social scientific strands of realist thought. It examines a recent theoretical debate among realist IR scholars concerning the relevance of the balance of power concept. It then reviews two critiques of realist doctrine: an International Society critique and a revisionist and emancipatory critique. The concluding section assesses the prospects for the realist tradition as a research programme in IR.

Introduction: Elements of Realism

Basic realist ideas and assumptions are: (1) a pessimistic view of human nature; (2) a conviction that international relations are necessarily conflictual and that international conflicts are ultimately resolved by war; (3) a high regard for the values of national security and state survival; (4) a basic scepticism that there can be progress in international politics which is comparable to that in domestic political life (see web links 3.01 and 3.02). These pervasive ideas and assumptions steer the thought of most leading realist IR theorists, both past and present.

In realist thought humans are characterized as being preoccupied with their own well-being in their competitive relations with each other. They desire to be in the driver's seat. They do not wish to be taken advantage of. They consequently strive to have the 'edge' in relations with other people—including international relations with other countries. In that regard at least, human beings are considered to be basically the same everywhere. Thus, the desire to enjoy an advantage over others and to avoid domination by others is universal. This pessimistic view of human nature is strongly evident in the IR theory of Hans Morgenthau (1965, 1985), who was the leading classical realist thinker of the twentieth century. He sees men and women as having a 'will to power'. That is particularly evident in politics and especially international politics: 'Politics is a struggle for power over men, and whatever its ultimate aim may be, power is its immediate goal and the modes of acquiring, maintaining, and demonstrating it determine the technique of political action' (Morgenthau 1965: 195).

Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and indeed all classical realists share that view to a greater or lesser extent. They believe that the acquisition and possession of power, and the deployment and uses of power, are central preoccupations of political activity. International politics is thus portrayed as—above all else—'power politics': an arena of rivalry, conflict, and war between states in which the same basic problems of defending the national interest and ensuring the survival of the state, and the security of its people, repeat themselves over and over again.

Realists thus share a core assumption that the international state system is anarchy i.e., a system with no higher, overarching authority, no world government. The state is the pre-eminent actor in world politics. International relations are primarily relations of states. All other actors in world politics—individuals, international organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc.—are either far less important or unimportant. The main point of foreign policy is to advance and defend the interests of the state. But states are not equal. On the contrary, there is an international hierarchy of power among states. The most important states in world politics are the great powers. International relations are understood by realists as primarily a struggle between the great powers for domination and security. Lesser and weaker powers are of secondary importance.

The normative core of realism is national security and state survival: these are the values that drive realist doctrine and realist foreign policy. The state is considered to be essential for the good life of its citizens: without a state to guarantee the means and conditions of security human life is bound to be, in the famous phrase of Thomas Hobbes (1946: 82), 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. The state is thus seen as a protector of its territory, of the

population, and of their distinctive and valued way of life. The national interest is the final arbiter in judging foreign policy.

The fact that all states must pursue their own national interest means that other countries and governments can never be relied upon or completely trusted. All international agreements are provisional and conditional on the willingness of states to observe them. That makes treaties and all other agreements, conventions, customs, rules, laws, and so on between states merely expedient arrangements which can and will be set aside if they conflict with the vital interests of states. There are no international obligations in the legal or ethical sense of the word—i.e., bonds of mutual duty—between independent states. The only fundamental responsibility of statespeople is to advance and to defend the national interest. That is nowhere stated more brutally than by Machiavelli in his famous book *The Prince* (see Box 3.3).

That means that there can be no progressive change in world politics comparable to the developments that characterize domestic political life. That also means that realist IR theory is considered to be valid not only at particular times but at all times, because the foregoing basic facts of world politics never change. That, at any rate, is what most realists argue and evidently believe.

There is an important distinction in realist IR theory between **classical realism** and **social science realism**. Classical realism is one of the 'traditional' approaches to IR. It is basically a normative approach, and focuses on the core political values of national security and state survival. Classical realist thought has been evident in many different historical periods, from ancient Greece right down to the present time. Strategic and structural realism is basically a scientific approach. It is largely (although not exclusively) American in origin. Indeed, it has been and perhaps still is the most prominent IR theory in the United States, which is home to by far the largest number of IR scholars in the world.

Classical Realism

What is classical realism? Who are the leading classical realists? What are their key ideas and arguments? In this section we shall examine, briefly, the international thought of three outstanding classical realists of the past: (1) the ancient Greek historian Thucydides; (2) the Renaissance Italian political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli; (3) the seventeenth-century English political and legal philosopher Thomas Hobbes. In the next subsection, we shall single out for special treatment the classical realist thought of the twentieth-century German–American IR theorist, Hans J. Morgenthau.

Thucydides

What we call international relations Thucydides saw as the inevitable competition and conflict between ancient Greek city-states (which together composed the cultural–linguistic civilization known as Hellas) and between Hellas and neighbouring non-Greek empires,

> ### BOX 3.1   International relations in Ancient Greece
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> The Greeks established the Hellenic League . . . and placed it under the leadership of Sparta and Athens. Despite the semblance of Greek unity during the Persian Wars (492–77 BCE) there were serious conflicts between members of the League, mostly occasioned by the smaller city-states' fear of Athenian imperialism and expansion. Thus, after the Greek victories over the Persians, Athens' competitors, led by Sparta, formed a rival organization, the Peloponnesian League, an intricate alliance and collective security system designed to deter further Athenian expansion . . . A bitter competition over trade and naval supremacy between Corinth and Athens led ultimately to the Peloponnesian Wars involving the two military alliances.
>
> Holsti (1988: 38–9)

such as Macedonia and Persia (see web links 3.04 and 3.05). Neither the states of Hellas nor their non-Greek neighbours were in any sense equal (Box 3.1). On the contrary, they were substantially unequal: there were a few 'great powers'—such as Athens, Sparta, and the Persian Empire, and many smaller and lesser powers—such as the tiny island statelets of the Aegean Sea. That inequality was considered to be inevitable and natural. A distinctive feature of Thucydides' brand of realism is thus its naturalist character. Aristotle said that 'man is a political animal'. Thucydides said in effect that political animals are highly unequal in their powers and capabilities to dominate others and to defend themselves. All states, large and small, must adapt to that given reality of unequal power and conduct themselves accordingly. If states do that, they will survive and perhaps even prosper. If states fail to do that, they will place themselves in jeopardy and may even be destroyed. Ancient history is full of many examples of states and empires, small and large, which were destroyed.

So Thucydides emphasizes the limited choices and the restricted sphere of manoeuvre available to rulers in the conduct of foreign policy. He also emphasizes that decisions have consequences; before any final decision is made, a decision maker should have carefully thought through the likely consequences, bad as well as good. In pointing that out, Thucydides is also emphasizing the ethics of caution and prudence in the conduct of foreign policy in an international world of great inequality, of restricted foreign-policy choices, and of ever-present danger as well as opportunity. Foresight, prudence, caution, and judgement are the characteristic political ethics of classical realism that Thucydides and most other classical realists are at pains to distinguish from private morality and the principle of justice. If a country and its government wish to survive and prosper, they better pay attention to these fundamental political maxims of international relations.

In his famous study of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) Thucydides (1972: 407) put his realist philosophy into the mouths of the leaders of Athens—a great power—in their dialogue with the leaders of Melos—a minor power—during a moment of conflict between the two city-states in 416 BCE. The Melians made an appeal to the principle of justice, which to them meant that their honour and dignity as an independent state should be respected by the powerful Athenians. But, according to Thucydides, justice is of a special kind in international relations. It is not about equal treatment for all, because states are in fact unequal.

BOX 3.2	Thucydides on the strong and the weak

The standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept . . . this is the safe rule—to stand up to one's equals, to behave with deference to one's superiors, and to treat one's inferiors with moderation. Think it over again, then, when we have withdrawn from the meeting, and let this be a point that constantly recurs to your minds—that you are discussing the fate of your country, that you have only one country, and that its future for good or ill depends on this one single decision which you are going to make.

Thucydides (1972: 406)

Rather, it is about recognizing your relative strength or weakness, about knowing your proper place, and about adapting to the natural reality of unequal power. Thucydides therefore let the Athenians reply to the Melian appeal as set out in Box 3.2.

That is probably the most famous example of the classical realist understanding of international relations as basically an anarchy of separate states that have no real choice except to operate according to the principles and practices of power politics in which security and survival are the primary values and war is the final arbiter.

Machiavelli

Power (the Lion) and deception (the Fox) are the two essential means for the conduct of foreign policy, according to the political teachings of Machiavelli (1984: 66). The supreme political value is national freedom, i.e., independence. The main responsibility of rulers is always to seek the advantages and to defend the interests of their state and thus ensure its survival. That requires strength; if a state is not strong it will be a standing invitation for others to prey upon it; the ruler must therefore be a lion. That also requires cunning and—if necessary—ruthlessness in the pursuit of self-interest: the ruler must also be a fox. If rulers are not astute, crafty, and adroit they might miss an opportunity that could bring great advantages or benefits to them and their state. Even more importantly, they might fail to notice a menace or threat which if not guarded against might harm or even destroy them, their regime, and possibly even the state as well. That rulers must be both lions and foxes is at the heart of Machiavelli's (1984: 66) realist theory. Classical realist IR theory therefore is primarily a theory of survival (Wight 1966).

The overriding Machiavellian assumption is that the world is a dangerous place (see web link 3.06). But it is also, by the same token, an opportune place. If any political leader hopes to survive in such a world, he or she must always be aware of dangers, must anticipate them, and must take the necessary precautions against them. And if they hope to prosper, to enrich themselves, and to bask in the reflected glory of their accumulated power and wealth, it is necessary for them to recognize and to exploit the opportunities that present themselves and to do that more quickly, more skilfully and—if necessary—more ruthlessly than any of their rivals or enemies. The conduct of foreign policy is thus an instrumental or 'Machiavellian'

> ### BOX 3.3   Machiavelli on the Prince's obligations
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> A prince . . . cannot observe all those things for which men are considered good, for in order to maintain the state he is often obliged to act against his promise, against charity, against humanity, and against religion. And therefore, it is necessary that he have a mind ready to turn itself according to the way the winds of fortune and the changeability of [political] affairs require . . . as long as it is possible, he should not stray from the good, but he should know how to enter into evil when necessity commands.
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> Machiavelli (1984: 59–60)

activity based on the intelligent calculation of one's power and interests as against the power and interests of rivals and competitors.

That shrewd and sober outlook is reflected in some typical Machiavellian maxims of realist statecraft, including the following: Be aware of what is happening. Do not wait for things to happen. Anticipate the motives and actions of others. Do not wait for others to act. Act before they do. The prudent state leader acts to ward off any threat posed by his or her neighbours. He or she should be prepared to engage in pre-emptive war and similar initiatives. The realist state leader is alert to opportunities in any political situation, and is prepared and equipped to exploit them.

Above all, according to Machiavelli, the responsible state leader must not operate in accordance with the principles of Christian ethics: love thy neighbour, be peaceful, and avoid war except in self-defence or in pursuit of a just cause; be charitable, share your wealth with others, always act in good faith, etc. Machiavelli sees these moral maxims as the height of political irresponsibility; if political leaders act in accordance with Christian virtues, they are bound to come to grief and they will lose everything. Not only that, they will sacrifice the property and perhaps the freedom and even the lives of their citizens, who depend upon their statecraft. The implication is clear: if a ruler does not know or respect the maxims of power politics, his or her statecraft will fail and with it the security and welfare of the citizens who depend absolutely upon it. In other words, political responsibility flows in a very different vein from ordinary, private morality. The fundamental, overriding values are the security and the survival of the state; that is what must guide foreign policy.

Machiavelli's realist writings are sometimes portrayed (Forde 1992: 64) as 'manuals on how to thrive in a completely chaotic and immoral world'. But that view is somewhat misleading. It overlooks the responsibilities of rulers not merely to themselves or to their personal regimes but also to their country and its citizens: what Machiavelli, thinking of Florence, refers to as 'the republic'. This is the civic virtue aspect of Machiavellian realism: rulers have to be both lions and foxes because their people depend upon them for their survival and prosperity. That dependence of the people upon their ruler, and specifically upon the wisdom of his or her foreign policy, is owing to the fact that the people's fate is entangled with the ruler's fate. That is the normative heart not only of Machiavellian realism but of classical realism generally.

Hobbes and the Security Dilemma

Thomas Hobbes thinks we can gain a fundamental insight into political life if we imagine men and women living in a 'natural' condition prior to the invention and institution of the sovereign state. He refers to that pre-civil condition as the '**state of nature**'. For Hobbes (1946: 82) the state of nature is an extremely adverse human circumstance in which there is a permanent 'state of war' 'of every man against every man'; in their natural condition every man, woman, and child is endangered by everybody else, life is constantly at risk, and nobody can be confident about his or her security and survival for any reasonable length of time. People are living in constant fear of each other. Hobbes characterizes that pre-civil condition as shown in Box 3.4. It is obviously not only desirable but also extremely urgent to escape from those intolerable circumstances at the earliest moment, if that is possible (see web link 3.07).

Hobbes believes there is an escape route from the state of nature into a civilized human condition, and that is via the creation and maintenance of a sovereign state. The means of escape is by men and women turning their fear of each other into rational joint collaboration with each other to form a security pact that can guarantee each other's safety. Men and women paradoxically cooperate politically because of their fear of being hurt or killed by their neighbours: they are 'civilized by fear of death' (Oakeshott 1975: 36). Their mutual fear and insecurity drive them away from their natural condition: the war of all against all. In other words, they are basically driven to institute a sovereign state not by their reason (intelligence) but, rather, by their passion (emotion). Their intelligence alone is insufficient to propel such action. With the value of peace and order firmly in mind, they willingly and jointly collaborate to create a state with a sovereign government that possesses absolute authority and credible power to protect them from both internal disorders and foreign enemies and threats. In the civil condition—i.e., of peace and order—under the protection of the state, men and women have an opportunity to flourish in relative safety; they no longer live under the constant threat of injury and fear of death. Being secure and at peace, they are now free to prosper. As Hobbes puts it, they can pursue and enjoy 'felicity', i.e., happiness, well-being (Box 3.5).

However, that statist solution to the problem of the natural condition of humankind automatically poses a serious political problem. A peaceful and civilized life can only be enjoyed within a state and it cannot extend beyond the state or exist between states. The very act of instituting a sovereign state to escape from the fearful state of nature among

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BOX 3.4	**Hobbes on the state of nature**

In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building . . . no arts; no letters; no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Hobbes (1946: 82)

BOX 3.5	Basic values of three classical realists	
THUCYDIDES	**MACHIAVELLI**	**HOBBES**
Political fate	Political agility	Political will
Necessity and security	Opportunity and security	Security dilemma
Political survival	Political survival	Political survival
Safety	Civic virtue	Peace and felicity

individual people simultaneously creates another state of nature between states. That poses what is usually referred to as 'the security dilemma' in world politics: the achievement of personal security and domestic security through the creation of a state is necessarily accompanied by the condition of national and international insecurity that is rooted in the anarchy of the state system.

There is no escape from the international security dilemma in the way that there is an escape from the personal security dilemma, because there is no possibility of forming a global state or world government. The main point about the **international state of nature** is that it is a condition of actual or potential war; there can be no permanent or guaranteed peace between sovereign states, no international peace. But there can be domestic peace—peace within the framework of the sovereign state—and the opportunities that only civil peace can provide for men and women to enjoy felicity. The state is organized and equipped for war in order to provide domestic peace for its subjects or citizens. Domestic peace can be realized in this way. International peace is an unrealizable dream and a dangerous illusion.

We can summarize the discussion thus far by briefly stating what these classical realists basically have in common. First, they agree that the human condition is a condition of insecurity and conflict that must be addressed and dealt with. Second, they agree that there is a body of political knowledge, or wisdom, to deal with the problem of security, and each of them tries to identify the keys to it. Finally, they agree that there is no final escape from this human condition, which is a permanent feature of human life. In other words, although there is a body of political wisdom—which can be identified and stated in the form of political maxims—there are no permanent or final solutions to the problems of politics—including international politics. There can be no enduring peace between states. This pessimistic and unhopeful view is at the heart of the IR theory of the leading classical realist of the twentieth century, Hans J. Morgenthau.

Morgenthau and Classical Realism

According to Morgenthau (1965), men and women are by nature political animals: they are born to pursue power and to enjoy the fruits of power. Morgenthau speaks of the *animus dominandi*, the human 'lust' for power (Morgenthau 1965: 192). The craving for power dictates a search not only for relative advantage but also for a secure political space—i.e., territory—to

BOX 3.6   **Morgenthau on political morality**

Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place. The individual may say for himself: '*fiat justitia, pereat mundus* (let justice be done even if the world perish)', but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care.

Morgenthau (1985: 12)

BOX 3.7   **President Nixon on the balance of power (1970)**

We must remember the only time in the history of the world that we have had any extended periods of peace is when there has been balance of power. It is when one nation becomes infinitely more powerful in relation to its potential competitor that the danger of war arises. So I believe in a world in which the United States is powerful. I think it will be a safer world and a better world if we have a strong, healthy United States, Europe, Soviet Union, China, Japan, each balancing the other, not playing one against the other, an even balance.

Quoted from Kissinger (1994: 705)

maintain oneself and to enjoy oneself free from the political dictates of others. The ultimate political space within which security can be arranged and enjoyed is, of course, the independent state. Security beyond the state and between states is impossible (see web links 3.08 and 3.09).

The human *animus dominandi* inevitably brings men and women into conflict with each other. That creates the condition of power politics which is at the heart of Morgenthau's realism (Box 3.6). 'Politics is a struggle for power over men, and whatever its ultimate aim may be, power is its immediate goal and the modes of acquiring, maintaining, and demonstrating it determine the technique of political action' (Morgenthau 1965: 195). Here, Morgenthau is clearly echoing Machiavelli and Hobbes. If people desire to enjoy a political space free from the intervention or control of foreigners, they will have to mobilize and deploy their power for that purpose. That is, they will have to organize themselves into a capable and effective state by means of which they can defend their interests. The anarchical system of states invites international conflict which ultimately takes the form of war (Box 3.7).

The struggle between states leads to the problem of justifying the threat or use of force in human relations (Box 3.7). Here we arrive at the central normative doctrine of classical realism. Morgenthau follows in the tradition of Thucydides and Machiavelli: there is one morality for the private sphere and another and very different morality for the public sphere. Political ethics allows some actions that would not be tolerated by private morality. Morgenthau is critical of those theorists and practitioners, such as American President Woodrow Wilson, who believed that it was necessary for political ethics to be brought into line with private ethics. For example, in a famous address to the US Congress in 1917, President Wilson said he could discern 'the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted

that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states' (Morgenthau 1965: 180).

Morgenthau considers that outlook to be not only ill advised but also irresponsible; it is not only mistaken intellectually but also fundamentally wrong morally. It is a gross intellectual mistake because it fails to appreciate the important difference between the public sphere of politics on the one hand, and the private sphere or domestic life on the other hand. According to classical realists, the difference is fundamental. As indicated, Machiavelli made that point by noting that if a ruler operated in accordance with Christian private ethics he or she would come to grief very quickly because political rivals could not be counted on to operate in the same Christian way. It would thus be an ill-advised and irresponsible foreign policy; and all the people who depended on the policy would suffer from the disaster it created.

Such a policy would be reckless in the extreme, and would thus constitute an ethical failure because political leaders bear a very heavy responsibility for the security and welfare of their country and its people. They are not supposed to expose their people to unnecessary perils or hardships. Sometimes—for example, during crises or emergencies—it may be necessary to carry out foreign policies and engage in international activities that would clearly be wrong according to private morality: spying, lying, cheating, stealing, conspiring, and so on are only a few of the many activities that would be considered at best dubious and at worst evil by the standards of private morality. Sometimes it may be necessary to trample on human rights for the sake of the national interest: during war, for example. Sometimes, it may be necessary to sacrifice a lesser good for a greater good or to choose the lesser of two evils. That tragic situation is, for realists, virtually a defining feature of international politics, especially during times of war. Here, Morgenthau is reiterating an insight into the ethically compromised nature of statecraft that was noted by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (1974: 82, 121), who spoke of the 'noble lie': 'Our rulers will probably have to make considerable use of lies and deceit for the good of their subjects.'

For Morgenthau, the heart of statecraft is thus the clear-headed knowledge that political ethics and private ethics are not the same, that the former cannot be and should not be reduced to the latter, and that the key to effective and responsible statecraft is to recognize this fact of power politics and to learn to make the best of it. Responsible rulers are not merely free, as sovereigns, to act in an expedient way. They must act in full knowledge that the mobilization and exercise of political power in foreign affairs inevitably involves moral dilemmas, and sometimes evil actions. The awareness that political ends (e.g., defending the national interest during times of war) must sometimes justify morally questionable or morally tainted means (e.g., the targeting and bombing of cities) leads to situational ethics and the dictates of 'political wisdom': prudence, moderation, judgement, resolve, courage, and so on. Those are the cardinal virtues of political ethics. They do not preclude evil actions. Instead, they underline the tragic dimension of international ethics: they recognize the inevitability of moral dilemmas in international politics: that evil actions must sometimes be taken to prevent a greater evil (Box 3.8).

Morgenthau (1985: 4–17) encapsulates his IR theory in 'six principles of political realism'. As a conclusion to this section of the chapter we shall briefly summarize them.

BOX 3.8	Morgenthau's concept of statecraft	
HUMAN NATURE (basic condition)	**POLITICAL SITUATION** (means and context)	**POLITICAL CONDUCT** (goals and values)
animus dominandi	Power politics	Political ethics (prudence, etc.)
Self-interest	Political power	Human necessities (security, etc.)
	Political circumstances	National interest
	Political skills	Balance of power

- Politics is rooted in a permanent and unchanging human nature which is basically self-centred, self-regarding, and self-interested.

- Politics is 'an autonomous sphere of action' and cannot therefore be reduced to morals (as Kantian or liberal theorists are prone to do).

- Self-interest is a basic fact of the human condition. International politics is an arena of conflicting state interests. But interests are not fixed: the world is in flux and interests can change. Realism is a doctrine that responds to the fact of a changing political reality.

- The ethics of international relations is a political or situational ethics which is very different from private morality. A political leader does not have the same freedom to do the right thing that a private citizen has. That is because a political leader has far heavier responsibilities than a private citizen. The leader is *responsible to* the people (typically of his or her country) who depend on him or her; the leader is *responsible for* their security and welfare. The responsible state leader should strive to do the best that circumstances permit on that particular day. That circumscribed situation of political choice is the normative heart of classical realist ethics.

- Realists are therefore opposed to the idea that particular nations can impose their ideologies on other nations and can employ their power in crusades to do that. Realists oppose that because they see it as a dangerous activity that threatens international peace and security. Ultimately, it could backfire and threaten the crusading country.

- Statecraft is a sober and uninspiring activity that involves a profound awareness of human limitations and human imperfections. That pessimistic knowledge of human beings as they are and not as we might wish them to be is a difficult truth that lies at the heart of international politics.

Schelling and Strategic Realism

Classical realists—including Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Morgenthau—provide a normative analysis as well as an empirical analysis of IR. Power is understood to be not only a fact of political life but also a matter of political responsibility. Indeed, power and responsibility

are inseparable concepts. For example, the balance of power is not merely an empirical statement about the way that world politics are alleged to operate. The balance of power is also a basic value: it is a legitimate goal and a guide to responsible statecraft on the part of the leaders of the great powers. In other words, for classical realists the balance of power is a desirable institution and a good thing to strive for because it prevents hegemonic world domination by any one great power. It upholds the basic values of international peace and security.

Since the 1950s and 1960s, new realist approaches have emerged that are a product of the quest for a social science of IR. Many current realists hold back from providing a normative analysis of world politics because it is deemed to be subjective and thus unscientific. That attitude to the study of values in world politics marks a fundamental divide between classical realists on the one hand and strategic realists and neorealists on the other. In this section, we shall examine **strategic realism** which is exemplified by the thought of Thomas Schelling (1980, 1996). Schelling does not pay much attention to the normative aspects of realism, although he does notice their presence in the background. In the next section we shall turn to neorealism which is associated most closely with Kenneth Waltz (1979). Waltz also tends to ignore the normative aspects of realism.

Strategic realism focuses centrally on foreign policy decision making. When state leaders confront basic diplomatic and military issues, they are obliged to think strategically—i.e., instrumentally—if they hope to be successful. Schelling (1980, 1996) seeks to provide analytical tools for strategic thought. He views diplomacy and foreign policy, especially of the great powers and particularly the United States, as a rational–instrumental activity that can be more deeply understood by the application of a form of logical analysis called 'game theory'. He summarizes his thought as shown in Box 3.9 (see web links 3.12, 3.13, and 3.14).

A central concept that Schelling employs is that of a 'threat': his analysis concerns how statespeople can deal rationally with the threat and dangers of nuclear war. For example, writing about nuclear deterrence Schelling makes the important observation that:

the efficacy of . . . [a nuclear] threat may depend on what alternatives are available to the potential enemy, who, if he is not to react like a trapped lion, must be left some tolerable recourse. We have come to realize that a threat of all-out retaliation . . . eliminates lesser courses of action and forces him to choose between extremes . . . [and] may induce him to strike first.

(Schelling 1980: 6–7)

BOX 3.9   **Schelling on diplomacy**

Diplomacy is bargaining: it seeks outcomes that, though not ideal for either party, are better for both than some of the alternatives . . . The bargaining can be polite or rude, entail threats as well as offers, assume a status quo or ignore all rights and privileges, and assume mistrust rather than trust. But . . . there must be some common interest, if only in the avoidance of mutual damage, and an awareness of the need to make the other party prefer an outcome acceptable to oneself. With enough military force a country may not need to bargain.

Schelling (1980: 168)

This is a good example of strategic realism which basically concerns how to employ power intelligently in order to get our military adversary to do what we desire and, more importantly, to avoid doing what we fear.

For Schelling, the activity of foreign policy is technically instrumental and thus free from moral choice. It is not primarily concerned about what is good or what is right. It is primarily concerned with the question: what is required for our policy to be successful? These questions are clearly similar to those posed above by Machiavelli. Schelling (1980) identifies and dissects with sharp insight various rational choice mechanisms, stratagems, and moves which, if followed by the principal actors, could generate collaboration and avoid disaster in a conflict-ridden world of nuclear-armed states. But Schelling does not base his instrumental analysis on an underlying political or civic ethics the way that Machiavelli does. The normative values at stake in foreign policy are largely taken for granted. That marks an important divide between classical realism on the one hand, and strategic realism and neorealism on the other.

One of the crucial instruments of foreign policy for a great power such as the United States is that of armed force. And one of the characteristic concerns of strategic realism is the use of armed force in foreign policy. Schelling devotes considerable thought to this issue. He observes an important distinction between brute force and coercion: 'between taking what you want and making someone give it to you'. He continues:

brute force succeeds when it is used, whereas the power to hurt is most successful when held in reserve. It is the threat of damage . . . that can make someone yield or comply.
(Schelling 1996: 169–70)

He adds that to make the use of our coercive apparatus effective 'we need to know what an adversary treasures and what scares him', and we also need to communicate clearly to him 'what will cause the violence to be inflicted and what will cause it to be withheld'.

Schelling goes on to make a fundamentally realist point: for coercion to be effective, it 'requires that our interests and our opponent's [interests] are not absolutely opposed . . . coercion requires finding a bargain'. Coercion is a method of bringing an adversary into a bargaining relationship and getting the adversary to do what we want him or her to do without having to compel it—i.e., the use of brute force, which is usually far more difficult, far less efficient, and far more dangerous (see web links 3.15 and 3.16). Schelling (1996: 181) summarizes his analysis of the modern diplomacy of violence in Box 3.10.

There obviously are striking similarities between the realism of Machiavelli and that of Schelling. However, the strategic realism of Schelling (1980) does not usually probe the ethics of foreign policy; it merely presupposes basic foreign goals without comment. The normative aspects of foreign policy and the justification of intelligent strategy in a dangerous world of nuclear-armed superpowers are intimated by his argument but largely hidden beneath the surface of his text. Schelling speaks quite readily of the 'dirty' and 'extortionate' heart of strategic realism. But he does not inquire why that kind of diplomacy could be called

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BOX 3.10   **Schelling on the diplomacy of violence**

The power to hurt is nothing new in warfare, but . . . modern technology . . . enhances the importance of war and threats of war as techniques of influence, not of destruction; of coercion and deterrence, not of conquest and defense; of bargaining and intimidation . . . War no longer looks like just a contest of strength. War and the brink of war are more a contest of nerve and risk-taking, of pain and endurance . . . The threat of war has always been somewhere underneath international diplomacy . . . Military strategy can no longer be thought of . . . as the science of military victory. It is now equally, if not more, the art of coercion, of intimidation and deterrence . . . Military strategy . . . has become the diplomacy of violence.

Schelling (1996: 168, 182)

BOX 3.11   **Realist statecraft: Instrumental realism and strategic realism**

	MACHIAVELLI'S RENAISSANCE STATECRAFT	**SCHELLING'S NUCLEAR STATECRAFT**
Mode	Instrumental realism	Strategic realism
Means	Strength and cunning	Intelligence, nerve and risk-taking
	Opportunism and luck	Logic and art of coercion
Goals	Security and survival	Security and survival
Values	Civic virtue	Value-neutral; non-prescriptive

'dirty' or 'extortionate', and he does not say whether that can be justified. Schelling's realism is fundamentally different from Machiavelli's realism in that important respect (Box 3.11).

Strategic realism thus presupposes values and carries normative implications. Unlike classical realism, however, it does not examine them or explore them. For example Schelling (1980: 4) is well aware that rational behaviour is motivated not only by a conscious calculation of advantages but also by 'an explicit and internally consistent value system'. But the role of value systems is not investigated by Schelling beyond making it clear that behaviour is related to values, such as vital national interests. Values are taken as given and treated instrumentally. In other words, the fundamental point of behaving the way that Schelling suggests that foreign policymakers *ought* to behave is not explored, clarified, or even addressed. He provides a strategic analysis but not a **normative theory** of IR. Here we come to a fundamental difference between Schelling and Machiavelli. For Machiavelli, the point was the survival and flourishing of the nation. Classical realists are explicitly concerned about the basic values at stake in world politics; they provide a political and ethical theory of IR. Most realists today are usually silent about them and seem to take them more or less for granted without commenting on them or building them into their IR theories. They limit their analyses to political structures and processes and they largely ignore political ends.

BOX 3.12	Waltz's neorealist theory: Structure and outcomes

INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURE	INTERNATIONAL OUTCOMES
(*state units and relations*)	(*effects of state competition*)
International anarchy	Balance of power
States as 'like units'	International recurrence and repetition
Unequal state capability	International conflict, war
Great power relations	International change

BOX 3.13	Waltz on the importance of structure

The ruler's, and later the state's, interest provides the spring of action; the necessities of policy arise from the unregulated competition of states; calculation based on these necessities can discover the policies that will best serve the state's interests; success is the ultimate test of policy, and success is defined as preserving and strengthening the state—structural constraints explain why the methods are repeatedly used despite differences in the persons and states who use them.

Waltz (1979: 117)

Waltz and Neorealism

The leading neorealist thinker is undoubtedly Kenneth Waltz (Box 3.12). Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979) seeks to provide a scientific explanation of the international political system. He takes some elements of classical realism as a starting point—e.g., independent states existing and operating in a system of international anarchy. But he departs from that tradition by giving no account of human nature and by ignoring the ethics of statecraft. His explanatory approach is heavily influenced by economic models. A scientific theory of IR leads us to expect states to behave in certain predictable ways. In Waltz's view the best IR theory is one that focuses centrally on the structure of the system, on its interacting units, and on the continuities and changes of the system. In classical realism, state leaders and their international decisions and actions are at the centre of attention. In neorealism, by contrast, the structure of the system that is external to the actors, in particular the relative distribution of power, is the central analytical focus. Leaders are relatively unimportant because structures compel them to act in certain ways. Structures more or less determine actions (Box 3.13).

According to Waltz's neorealist theory, a basic feature of international relations is the decentralized structure of anarchy between states. States are alike in all basic functional respects—i.e., in spite of their different cultures or ideologies or constitutions or histories, they all perform the same basic tasks. All states have to collect taxes, conduct foreign policy,

and so on. States differ significantly only in regard to their greatly varying capabilities. In Waltz's own words, the state units of an international system are 'distinguished primarily by their greater or lesser capabilities for performing similar tasks . . . the structure of a system changes with changes in the distribution of capabilities across the system's units' (Waltz 1979: 97). In other words, international change occurs when great powers rise and fall and the balance of power shifts accordingly (see web link 3.18 and 3.19). A typical means of such change is great-power war.

As indicated, the states that are crucially important for determining changes in the structure of the international system are the great powers. A balance of power between states can be achieved, but war is always a possibility in an anarchical system. Waltz distinguishes between bipolar systems—such as existed during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union—and multipolar systems—such as existed both before and after the Cold War. Waltz believes that bipolar systems are more stable and thus provide a better guarantee of peace and security than do multipolar systems. 'With only two great powers, both can be expected to act to maintain the system' (Waltz 1979: 204). That is because in maintaining the system they are maintaining themselves. According to that view, the Cold War was a period of international stability and peace (Box 3.14).

Unlike Schelling's strategic realism, Waltz's neorealist approach does not provide explicit policy guidance to state leaders as they confront the practical problems of world politics. That is presumably because they have little or no choice, owing to the confining international structure in which they must operate. Waltz (1979: 194–210) does address the question of 'the management of international affairs'. However, that discussion is far more about the structural constraints of foreign policy than it is about what Schelling clearly understands

BOX 3.14	John Gaddis's portrait of the long bipolar peace during the Cold War

1. The postwar bipolar system realistically reflected the facts of where military power resided at the end of World War II . . .

2. The post-1945 bipolar structure was a simple one that did not require sophisticated leadership to maintain it . . .

3. Because of its relatively simple structure, alliances in this bipolar system have tended to be more stable than they had been in the 19th century and in the 1919–1939 period. It is striking that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has equalled in longevity the most durable of the pre-World War I alliances, that between Germany and Austria-Hungary; it has lasted almost twice as long as the Franco-Russian alliance, and certainly much longer than any of the tenuous alignments of the interwar period.

In short, without anyone's having designed it . . . the nations of the post-war era lucked into a system of international relations that because it has been based upon realities of power, has served the cause of order—if not justice—better than one might have expected.

Gaddis (1987: 221–2)

as the logic and art of foreign policy. Schelling operates with a notion of situated choice: the rational choice for the situation or circumstances in which leaders find themselves. The choice may be sharply confined by the circumstances but it is a choice nevertheless and it may be made intelligently or stupidly, skilfully or maladroitly, etc. Waltz's neorealism makes far less provision for statecraft and diplomacy. His argument is at base a determinist theory in which structure dictates policy. In this important respect, it is an explicit departure from classical realism, which focuses on the politics and ethics of statecraft (Morgenthau 1985).

However, just beneath the surface of Waltz's neorealist text, and occasionally on the surface, there is a recognition of the ethical dimension of international politics which is virtually identical to classical realism. The core concepts that Waltz employs have a normative aspect. For example, he operates with a concept of state sovereignty: 'To say that a state is sovereign means that it decides for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems' (Waltz 1979: 96). Thus state sovereignty means being in a position to decide, a condition which is usually signified by the term 'independence': sovereign states are postulated as independent of other sovereign states. But what is independence? Waltz (1979: 88) says that each state is formally 'the equal of all the others. None is entitled to command; none is required to obey'. But to say that independence is an 'entitlement' is to take notice of a *norm* which is acknowledged; in this case the norm of 'equal' state sovereignty. Waltz also assumes that states are worth fighting for. That implies values: those of state security and survival. But unlike the classical realists, Waltz does not explicitly discuss those values. He simply takes them for granted.

Waltz (1979: 113) also operates with a concept of the national interest: 'each state plots the course it thinks will best serve its interests'. For classical realists the national interest is the basic guide of responsible foreign policy: it is a moral idea that must be defended and promoted by state leaders. For Waltz, however, the national interest seems to operate like an automatic signal commanding state leaders when and where to move. The difference here is: Morgenthau believes that state leaders are duty bound to conduct their foreign policies by reference to the guidelines laid down by the national interest, and they may be condemned for failing to do that; Waltz's neorealist theory hypothesizes that they will always do that more or less automatically. Morgenthau thus sees states as organizations guided by leaders whose foreign policies are successful or unsuccessful, depending on the astuteness and wisdom of their decisions. Waltz sees states as robots that respond to the impersonal constraints and dictates of the international system.

Similarly, Waltz (1979: 195) argues that the great powers manage the international system. Classical realists argue that they ought to manage the system and that they can be criticized when they fail to manage it properly—i.e., when they fail to maintain international order. The notion that the great powers must be 'Great Responsibles' is not only a traditional realist idea; it is also a core idea of the International Society approach (see Chapter 5). Great powers are understood by Waltz to have 'a big stake in their system' and for them management of the system is not only something that is possible but also something that is 'worthwhile'. It is perfectly clear that Waltz values international order. It is clear, too, that he is convinced that international order is more likely to be achieved in bipolar systems than in multipolar systems.

A distinctive characteristic of neorealism emerges at this point. Waltz wants to present a scientific *explanation* of international politics which is a big step beyond the political and moral theories of classical realism. He cannot avoid implying normative concerns, however, and he cannot escape from making what are implicitly normative assumptions. His entire theory rests on normative foundations of a traditional–realist kind. Thus, although he makes no explicit reference to values or ethics and avoids normative theory, the basic assumptions and concepts he uses and the basic international issues with which he is concerned are normative ones. In that respect his neorealism is not as far removed from classical realism as his claims about scientific theory imply. This serves as a reminder that scientific explanations can frequently involve norms and values (see Chapter 9).

Mearsheimer, Stability Theory, and Hegemony

Both strategic realism and neorealism were intimately connected with the Cold War. They were distinctive IR theory responses to that special, if not unique, historical situation. Being strongly influenced by the behaviouralist revolution in IR (see Chapter 2) they both sought to apply scientific methods to the theoretical and practical problems posed by the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Schelling tried to show how a notion of strategy based on game theory could shed light on the nuclear rivalry between the two superpowers. Waltz tried to show how a structural analysis could shed light on 'the long peace' (Gaddis 1987) that was produced by the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War (see web link 3.21). The end of the Cold War thus raises an important question about the future of realist theories that were developed during what could be regarded as an exceptional period of modern international history. In this section we shall address that question in connection with neorealism.

In a widely discussed essay John Mearsheimer (1993) takes up the neorealist argument of Waltz (1979) and applies it to both the past and the future. He says that neorealism has continued relevance for explaining international relations; neorealism is a general theory that applies to other historical situations besides that of the Cold War. He also argues that neorealism can be employed to predict the course of international history beyond the Cold War.

Mearsheimer builds on Waltz's (1979: 161–93) argument concerning the stability of bipolar systems as compared with multipolar systems (see web link 3.20). These two configurations are considered to be the main structural arrangements of power that are possible among independent states. As indicated, Waltz claims that bipolar systems are superior to multipolar systems because they provide greater international stability and thus greater peace and security. There are three basic reasons why bipolar systems are more stable and peaceful. First, the number of great-power conflicts is fewer, and that reduces the possibilities of great-power war. Second, it is easier to operate an effective system of deterrence because fewer great powers are involved. Finally, because only two powers dominate the system the chances of miscalculation and misadventure are lower. There are fewer fingers

on the trigger. In short, the two rival superpowers can keep their eye steadily fixed on each other without the distraction and confusion that would occur if there were a larger number of great powers, as was the case prior to 1945 and arguably has been the case since 1990 (Mearsheimer 1993: 149–50).

The question Mearsheimer (1993: 141) poses is: what would happen if the bipolar system were replaced by a multipolar system? How would that basic system change affect the chances for peace and the dangers of war in post-Cold War Europe? The answer Mearsheimer gives is as follows:

the prospects for major crises and war in Europe are likely to increase markedly if . . . this scenario unfolds. The next decades in a Europe without the superpowers would probably not be as violent as the first 45 years of this century, but would probably be substantially more prone to violence than the past 45 years.

(Mearsheimer 1993: 142)

What is the basis for that pessimistic conclusion? Mearsheimer (1993: 142–3) argues that the distribution and nature of military power are the main sources of war and peace and says, specifically, that 'the long peace' between 1945 and 1990 was a result of three fundamentally important conditions: the bipolar system of military power in Europe; the approximate military equality between the United States and the Soviet Union; and the reality that both of the rival superpowers were equipped with an imposing arsenal of nuclear weapons. The withdrawal of the superpowers from the European heartland would give rise to a multipolar system consisting of five major powers (Germany, France, Britain, Russia, and perhaps Italy) as well as a number of minor powers. That system would be 'prone to instability'. 'The departure of the superpowers would also remove the large nuclear arsenals they now maintain in Central Europe. This would remove the pacifying effect that these weapons have had on European politics' (Mearsheimer 1993: 143).

Thus, according to Mearsheimer (1993: 187), the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union 'was principally responsible for transforming a historically violent region into a very peaceful place' (Box 3.15). Mearsheimer argues that the demise of the bipolar Cold War order and the emergence of a multipolar Europe will produce a highly undesirable return to the bad old ways of European anarchy and instability and even a renewed danger of international conflict, crises, and possibly war. He makes the following highly controversial point:

The West has an interest in maintaining peace in Europe. It therefore has an interest in maintaining the Cold War order, and hence has an interest in the continuation of the Cold War confrontation; developments that threaten to end it are dangerous.

(Mearsheimer 1993: 332)

In the same vein as Waltz, Mearsheimer regards the behaviour of states as shaped if not indeed determined by the anarchical *structure* of international relations. He differs from Waltz, however, whom he characterizes as a 'defensive realist' i.e., someone who recognizes that states must and do seek power in order to be secure and to survive, but who believe that

BOX 3.15	Mearsheimer's neorealist stability theory
CONDITIONS OF STABLE BIPOLARITY	**CONDITIONS OF UNSTABLE MULTIPOLARITY**
• Europe during the Cold War	• Europe before 1945 and after 1990
• Two superpowers	• Several great powers
• Rough superpower equality	• Unequal and shifting balances of power
• Nuclear deterrence	• Conventional military rivalry
• Conquest is difficult	• Conquest is less difficult and more tempting
• Superpower discipline	• Great power indiscipline and risk-taking

excessive power is counterproductive, because it provokes hostile alliances by other states. For Waltz, it does not make sense, therefore, to strive for excessive power beyond that which is necessary for security and survival. Mearsheimer speaks of Waltz's theory as '**defensive realism**'.

Mearsheimer agrees with Waltz that anarchy compels states to compete for power. However, he argues that states seek hegemony, that they are ultimately more aggressive than Waltz portrays them. The goal for a country such as the United States is to dominate the entire system, because only in that way could it rest assured that no other state or combination of states would even think about going to war against the United States. All major powers strive for that ideal situation. But the planet is too big for global hegemony. The oceans are huge barriers. No state would have the necessary power. Mearsheimer therefore argues that states can only become the hegemon in their own region of the world. In the Western hemisphere, for example, the United States has long been by far the most powerful state. No other state—Canada, Mexico, Brazil—would even think about threatening or employing armed force against the United States.

Regional hegemons can see to it, however, that there are no other regional hegemons in any other part of the world. They can prevent the emergence and existence of a peer competitor. According to Mearsheimer, that is what the United States is trying to ensure. That is because a peer competitor might try to interfere in a regional hegemon's sphere of influence and control. For almost two centuries, since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the United States endeavoured to ensure that no great power intervened militarily in the Western hemisphere. As a great power for most of the past century, the United States has made great efforts to ensure that there is no regional hegemon in either Europe or East Asia, the two areas where there are other major powers or great powers and a potential peer competitor could emerge: Germany in Europe and China in East Asia. The United States confronted Imperial Germany in the First World War, Nazi Germany in the Second World War, and the Soviet Union in the Cold War, because if any of those states had gained hegemony in Europe it would be free to intervene in the Western hemisphere, and possibly threaten the security of the United States.

According to Mearsheimer, all states want to become regional hegemons. He argues that Germany will become the dominant European state and that China will likely emerge as a

potential hegemon in Asia. For example, his theory leads one to believe that China will eventually want to dominate East Asia. By the same theory, if that were to happen one would also expect the United States to react to try to prevent or undercut Chinese power in East Asia. Indeed, if China became a peer competitor America could be expected to go to great lengths to contain China's influence and prevent China from intervening in other regions of the world where American national interests are at stake. That is why he refers to his theory as '**offensive realism**', which rests on the assumption that great powers 'are always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal' (Mearsheimer 2001: 29). Mearsheimer, like other realists, believes that his argument has general application to all places at all times. There will always be a struggle between nation-states for power and domination in the international system. There has always been conflict, there is conflict, and there always will be conflict over power. And there is nothing that anyone can do to prevent it. This is why the title of one of his books is *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism has come in for criticism from many quarters. Some of those criticisms are levelled by liberal IR theorists. His theory of offensive realism has been criticized for failing to explain peaceful change and cooperation between great powers, such as between Britain and the United States for the past century and longer. Critics also argue, for example, that it fails to explain the emergence of the European Union, which involves the pooling of sovereignty by states in an international community. However, we shall be concerned only with selected criticisms from within realism itself. At least one potential regional hegemon has been involved in the process of European unification: Germany. Mearsheimer would explain that by the military presence of the United States in Europe, which checks Germany's military expansion. But from within his own theory one could ask: why do American armed forces remain in Europe more than a decade after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and in the absence of any other great power trying to dominate the region?

A realist like Morgenthau would probably criticize Mearsheimer's argument for ignoring the responsibilities of statecraft, and for leaving the impression that states are conflicting power machines that behave without any human involvement as to their management or mismanagement. There are no misadventures, misunderstandings, or mistakes in the behaviour of great powers; there is no good or bad judgement, no misunderstanding, no miscalculation, etc. There is only power, conflict, war, hegemony, subjugation, and so on. That same criticism of a mechanistic model could of course also be directed against Waltz's defensive theory. A related criticism is the theory's deficiency in empirical perceptiveness and subtlety. Mearsheimer sees no significant difference in the current and future power relationships between states in Western Europe as compared with those in East Asia. Here, it has been pointed out,

he is at odds with that more famous realist, Henry Kissinger who, in his book *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?*, convincingly argues that for the foreseeable future there is little or no likelihood of the nations of Western Europe going to war with each other or with the United States, but that war is much more possible among the nations of Asia or between America and Asian powers' (see web link 3.23).

(Sempa 2009: 90)

Mearsheimer's offensive realist theory has also been criticized for failing to look at historical experiences that are contrary to his thesis, or in other words for not being sufficiently open-minded and eclectic in seeking to explain relations between great powers and the balance of power. Eclecticism, however, means opening one's approach to the possibility of factors and forces not predicted by one's theory. Ultimately, eclecticism would also transform theory into history. That is not what neorealist theories are content with. Mearsheimer, like Waltz, wants to come up with explanations that satisfy the concept of a 'scientific' theory in accordance with philosophy of science criteria. How successful they have been in that regard is still being debated.

Neoclassical Realism

There has been an attempt recently to frame a realist theory that combines within one analytical framework the best elements of neorealism with those of classical realism. Like the versions of realism already discussed, this one rests upon the assumption that IR is basically an anarchical system. It draws upon neorealism, and that of Waltz in particular, by acknowledging the significance of the structure of the international state system and the relative power of states. It also draws upon classical realism, and Morgenthau and Kissinger in particular, by emphasizing the importance of leadership and foreign policy. **Neoclassical realism** departs from both of these basic realist approaches, however, by attempting to come up with a realist theory that can respond positively to some of the arguments associated with liberalism (see Chapter 4). Unlike the theories of realism discussed by the critics mentioned in this section, this is a recent approach. It remains to be seen whether it will become well-established.

Advocates of neoclassical realism take a middle-of-the-road view: that state leadership operates and foreign policy is carried on within the overall constraints or 'broad parameters' of the anarchical structure of international relations (Rose 1998: 144). At first glance the combination of neorealism and classical realism might appear to be contradictory. The determinist–materialist theory of Waltz seems to be at odds with the foreign policy leadership and ethics of statecraft theory of Morgenthau and Kissinger.

As indicated in the section on classical realism, classical realists assume that the underlying condition of international relations is one of anarchy. They typically argue that foreign policy is always framed and carried out under the influences and constraints of international circumstances—defined by the presence and policies of foreign powers—whatever those circumstances happen to be at any particular time, whether threatening or promising. They view international circumstances as the most important pressures on foreign policy. Statesmen and stateswomen are thus seen as necessarily having to deal with foreign powers in order to carry out their responsibilities for ensuring the security and survival of their country. Classical realists see that as the heavy moral responsibility of statesmen and stateswomen: the heartland of the ethics of statecraft.

Neoclassical realists are not content with that traditional or classical realist way of framing the problem This is clearly evident by their acknowledgement of the significance of

neorealism, and by their desire not to repudiate neorealism but rather to improve upon it by introducing elements which neorealists have left out of their analysis. Neoclassical realists clearly want to retain the structural argument of neorealism. But they also want to add to it the instrumental (policy or strategy) argument of the role of stateleaders on which classical realism places its emphasis (Box 3.16).

Neoclassical realists argue that 'anarchy gives states considerable latitude in defining their security interests, and the relative distribution of power merely sets parameters for grand strategy' (Lobell et al. 2009: 7). In other words, anarchy and the relative power of states do not dictate the foreign policies of stateleaders. However, neoclassical realists also argue that 'leaders who consistently fail to respond to systemic incentives put their state's very survival at risk' (Lobell et al. 2009: 7). That is to say, international structure (anarchy and the balance of power) constrains states but it does not ultimately dictate leadership policies and actions.

This way of portraying the structural situation in which stateleaders find themselves in their conduct of foreign policy—there are constraints of relative power but there is also latitude for choice—seems not very different from classical realism. The difference between the two concerns the interest in normative aspects of IR. Classical realists—like Morgenthau or Kissinger—will want to judge leadership success or failure in relation to ethical standards: do leaders live up to their responsibilities or not? Neoclassical realists focus on explaining what goes on in terms of the pressures of international structure on the one hand and the decisions made by state leaders on the other. Neoclassical realism also seeks to introduce an element that all other realists ignore or downplay in their analyses: namely internal characteristics of states. Neoclassical realism:

seeks to explain why, how, and under what conditions the internal characteristics of states—the extractive and mobilization capacity of politic-military institutions, the influence of domestic societal actors and interest groups, the degree of state autonomy from society, and the level of elite or societal cohesion—intervene between the leaders' assessment of international threats and opportunities and the actual diplomatic, military, and foreign economic policies those leaders pursue.

(Lobell et al. 2009: 4)

BOX 3.16	Classical Realism, Neorealism, and Neoclassical Realism		
	CLASSICAL	**NEOREALISM**	**NEOCLASSICAL**
Anarchy	yes	yes	yes
State power	yes	yes	yes
Leadership	yes	no	yes
Statecraft ethics	yes	no	no
Domestic society	no	no	yes
Social science	no	yes	yes

That kind of analysis is inspired by liberal approaches to IR (see Chapter 4), which emphasize the importance of domestic conditions of countries in seeking to explain international relations and foreign policies. This contrasts sharply with all other realist approaches, including both neorealism and classical realism. The advantage of neoclassical realism is that an additional element which is relevant for explaining IR is included in the theory. The possible drawback is that the theory becomes less parsimonious and more oriented towards including a large number of different elements in the analysis.

Rethinking the Balance of Power

For classical realists, probably the greatest responsibility of statesmen was the responsibility to maintain a balance of military power among the great powers. The point of doing that was to prevent any great power from getting out of control and attempting to impose its political and military will on everybody else. The two greatest examples in modern European history are French King Louis XIV's attempt to dominate Europe in the late seventeenth century, and Napoleon's attempt to do the same a century later. Both attempts ultimately failed. The other great powers at the time united to form military alliances that defeated each of those French bids for European hegemony.

Thus, in classical realist thinking, the balance of power is a valued political objective that promotes national security, upholds order among great powers, and makes the independence of states and their peoples possible. The Second World War can readily be seen in this light: Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan made a bid to impose their separate hegemonies on Europe and Asia; and Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States formed an alliance to counter those attempts and restore a balance of power. The Cold War is generally portrayed as a bipolar balance of power based on nuclear weapons and often referred to as a balance of terror—between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Consequently, the end of the Cold War led many statesmen and scholars alike to envisage a new world order based on political freedom and economic progress which would not require any balance of terror. That hope did not last long. With the outbreak of various armed conflicts in the 1990s, some scholars began to speak of stable Cold War bipolarity being replaced by unstable post-Cold War multipolarity. That led to new IR scholarship which attempted to account for those post-Cold War conflicts in balance of power terms.

We can only summarize the main points of these arguments. Some scholars used the occasion to mount a root-and-branch assault on the relevance of classical balance of power theory to our understanding of world history (Wohlforth in Nexon 2009). They argued that many factors ignored by the theory—administrative capacity of hegemons, expansion of state membership in the international system, the societal unity or disunity of states, and the existence of international society norms—affect the existence of hegemons (hierarchy) and the degree of anarchy in the state system. Some argued that the new conflicts contradicted

the classical proposition that the balance of power prevents hegemony (Wohlforth in Nexon 2009: 331). Others argued that the post-Cold war conflicts called for new conceptions of 'balance' and 'balancing' and thus for new theories of the balance of power.

Like many key concepts in IR, and perhaps even more than most, the balance of power has often proved to be not so easy to pin down. More than half a century ago a leading American scholar identified how variously and differently the term 'balance of power' was employed in IR scholarship: in some cases the expression was used in contradictory ways (Haas 1953). That same difficulty has been noted in recent scholarship: 'While the balance of power concept is one of the most prominent ideas in the theory and practice of international relations, it is also one of the most ambiguous and intractable ones' (Paul et al. 2004: 29).

Yet this underestimates the value and persistence of the concept, because there is substantial agreement among scholars on *two important* points that should be noted. First, the balance of power is understood as an international relationship that is so likely to occur, and is so widely occurring, that it appears to be virtually a natural phenomenon. There is thus a degree of predictability about it. Second, the balance of power assumes equilibrium of power among a small *number* of major states, where power is defined narrowly in terms of military capability. In other words, the balance of power is understood as a systemic and virtually mechanical condition of international relations which is likely to occur and recur when there are several military powers interacting. Since that system of powerful states seems likely to persist indefinitely, as a primary feature of international politics, balance of power theory can be expected to remain a central concept of IR theory.

It is not hard to find current examples of power balancing. Both China and Russia actively seek influence and control of their respective regions; Iran is attempting to change the balance of power in the Middle East in its favour; classical power balancing has by no means ended. Yet many realists did expect that the dominance of the winning side in the Cold War—the United States—would have been much more profoundly challenged by other great powers than has actually been the case (Fettweis 2004). And peaceful cooperation between the European great powers in the EU has not ended with the disappearance of the common enemy, the Soviet Union. If classical power balancing has decreased in importance, what might have taken its place?

This brings us to the distinction between a hard balance of power and a soft balance of power. The former is the classical realist concept of a balance of military power between major powers. The latter, on the other hand, is a more recent conception. In this theory the military power of states or international organizations—e.g., alliances—is not the main focus, as it is for both classical realists and international society theorists. Rather, it emphasizes tacit or informal institutional collaboration or ad hoc cooperation among states for the purpose of joint security against a foreign threat. The concept clearly seeks to enlarge the focus of the balance of power, to include arrangements that are seen to be significant non-military ways in which major powers interact that cushion, assuage, or ease their relations which would otherwise be more antagonistic, uncompromising, and hostile.

The notion of a soft balance of power has been the subject of much critical analysis. One important critique is the charge that the concept 'stretches' the notion of the balance of

power to the point of making it so elastic and diverse that its core meaning is lost sight of (Nexon 2009). This is to criticize the concept for resting on what philosophers refer to as a 'category mistake', which is the error of overlooking or conflating categorical differences in bracketing phenomena together. The original concept of 'soft power' displays that problem, since the adjective 'soft' enlarges the noun 'power' to the point of characterizing such social elements as 'norms', 'laws', 'procedures', 'institutions', etc. as kinds or manifestations of power. Yet conventionally understood, such terms belong within the normative category of authority (or right) and outside the instrumental or structural category of power. With such difficulties in mind, the concept of a soft balance of power has been criticized for being conceptually incoherent (Sartori 1984).

Where does this recent theory leave the balance of power concept? Some proponents of the soft balance of power argue that it encapsulates more of the ways that power is balanced. It is thus more faithful to reality, more accurate, more empirical. The critics in the section on strategic realism have already had their say, that some recent theory, especially soft power theory, muddies the waters and confuses our understanding of the balance of power, rather than enhancing it. We leave it to our readers to decide. What is clear, however one decides, is that the balance of power theory in IR is still very much alive, which is why we have discussed it (see esp. Paul et al. 2004; Wohlforth in Nexon 2009).

Two Critiques of Realism

The dominance of realism in IR during the second half of the twentieth century, especially in the United States, spawned a substantial literature that criticizes many of its core assumptions and arguments (see web link 3.30). As indicated in Chapter 2, realism itself rose to a position of academic pre-eminence in the 1940s and 1950s by effectively criticizing the liberal idealism of the interwar period. Neorealism has been involved in a renewed debate with liberalism. We shall investigate that debate in Chapter 4. Here we shall confine our discussion to two important critiques of realism: an International Society critique and an emancipatory critique.

The International Society tradition (see Chapter 5) is critical of realism on two counts. First, it regards realism as a one-dimensional IR theory that is too narrowly focused. Second, it claims that realism fails to capture the extent to which international politics is a dialogue of different IR voices and perspectives. The International Society tradition is not critical of every aspect of realist thought in IR. On the contrary, International Society scholars acknowledge that classical realism provides an important angle of vision on world politics. They agree that there is a strain in human nature that is self-interested and combative. They share a focus of analysis in which states loom large. They operate with a conception of international relations as anarchical. They agree that power is important and that international relations consist significantly of power politics. They also agree that international theory is in some fundamental respects a theory of security and survival. They recognize that the

national interest is an important value in world politics. In short, International Society scholars incorporate several elements of realism into their own approach.

However, they do not believe that realism captures all of IR or even its most important aspects. They argue that realism overlooks, ignores, or plays down many important facets of international life. It overlooks the cooperative strain in human nature. It ignores the extent to which international relations form an anarchical *society* and not merely an anarchical system. States are not only in conflict, they also share common interests and observe common rules which confer mutual rights and duties. Realism ignores other important actors besides states, such as human beings and NGOs. Realism plays down the extent to which the relations of states are governed by international law. It also plays down the extent to which international politics are progressive, i.e., cooperation instead of conflict can prevail. International Society theorists recognize the importance of the national interest as a value, but they refuse to accept that it is the only value that is important in world politics.

Martin Wight (1991), a leading representative of the International Society approach, places a great deal of emphasis on the character of international politics as a historical dialogue between three important philosophies/ideologies: realism (Machiavelli), rationalism (Grotius), and revolutionism (Kant). In order to acquire a holistic understanding of IR it is necessary, according to Martin Wight, to comprehend the dialectical relations of these three basic normative perspectives (see Chapter 5).

At least one leading classical realist appears to agree with Martin Wight. In a monumental study of diplomacy, the American scholar and statesman Henry Kissinger (1994: 29–55) explores the long-standing and continuing dialogue in diplomatic theory and practice between the foreign-policy outlook of pessimistic realism and that of optimistic liberalism. For example, Kissinger discerns that dialogue in the contrasting foreign policies of US Republican President Theodore Roosevelt and Democratic President Woodrow Wilson in the early twentieth century. Roosevelt was 'a sophisticated analyst of the balance of power' while Wilson was 'the originator of the vision of a universal world organization, the League of Nations'. Both perspectives have shaped American foreign policy historically. That dialogue between realism and liberalism is not confined to past and present American foreign policy; it is also evident historically in British foreign policy. Kissinger contrasts the politically cautious and pragmatic nineteenth-century British foreign policy of Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and the morally aroused and interventionist foreign policy of his Liberal counterpart, William Gladstone. Kissinger implies that both these perspectives have a legitimate place in American foreign policy and in British foreign policy, and that neither of them should be ignored. Here, then, is an implied criticism of realism: that it is inclined to ignore or at least to downplay the liberal and democratic voice in world affairs.

We thus have reason to ask whether Kissinger should be classified as a realist at all. Is he a secret member of the International Society school? We believe Kissinger should be regarded as a classical realist. Although he portrays the Wilsonian voice in American foreign policy and the Gladstonian voice in British foreign policy as legitimate and important, it is abundantly clear from his lengthy analysis that his preferred basis for any successful foreign

policy for America and Britain is the realist outlook disclosed by Roosevelt and Disraeli, with whom Kissinger strongly identifies.

International Society scholars can thus be criticized for failing to recognize that while the liberal voice is important in world politics the realist voice is always first in importance. That is because it is the best perspective on the core problem of IR: war. According to realists, difficult times such as war demand hard choices that realists are better able to clarify than any other IR scholars or practitioners. Liberals—according to classical realists—tend to operate on the assumption that foreign-policy choices are easier and less dangerous than they really may be: they are the foremost theorists of peaceful, prosperous, and easy times. For realists the problem with that is: what shall we do when times are difficult? If we follow the liberals we may fail to respond adequately to the challenge with appropriate hard choices and we may thus place ourselves—and those who depend on our policies and actions—at risk. In other words, realism will always be resorted to during times of crisis when hard choices have to be made, and some criteria for making those choices are required.

An alternative and very different critique of realism is that of **emancipatory theory**. Because realism has been such a dominant IR theory, emancipatory theorists direct their energies into providing what they consider to be a root-and-branch critique of realist assumptions and arguments. That is intended to pave the way for a complete reconceptualization of IR. Their critique of realism is central to their project of global human emancipation. Echoing Marxists of an earlier period, emancipatory theorists argue that IR theories should seek to grasp correctly how men and women are prisoners of existing international structures. IR theorists should indicate how they can be liberated from the state and from other structures of contemporary world politics that have the effect of oppressing them and thus preventing them from flourishing as they would otherwise. A central aim of emancipatory theory, then, is the transformation of the realist state-centric and power-focused structure of international politics. The goal is human liberation and fulfilment. The role of the emancipatory IR theorist is to determine the correct theory for guiding the practice of human liberation.

An emancipatory critique of realism has been developed by Ken Booth (1991). Booth (1991: 313–26) builds his critique on a familiar realist view of the 'Westphalian system', 'a game' that is 'played by diplomats and soldiers on behalf of statesmen'. The 'security game' that states learned to play was 'power politics, with threats producing counterthreats, alliances, counteralliances and so on'. In IR, that produced an 'intellectual hegemony of realism': a conservative or 'status quo' theory based on the security and survival of existing states, and focused on strategic thinking in which the concept of military (sometimes nuclear) threats was the core of realist thought. In other words, Booth is specifically criticizing strategic realism associated with thinkers such as Thomas Schelling (1980) discussed in the section on strategic realism.

Booth claims that the realist game of power politics and military (including nuclear) strategy is obsolete because security is now a local problem within disorganized and sometimes failed states. It is no longer primarily a problem of national security and national defence. Security is now more than ever both cosmopolitan and local at the same time: a problem of individual humans (e.g., citizens in failed states) and of the global community

of humankind (facing, for example, ecological threats or nuclear extinction). Security is different in scope; it is also different in character: emancipation is the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do. War and the threat of war is one of those constraints, together with poverty, poor education, political oppression, and so on. Security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin. Emancipation, not power or order, produces true security (Booth 1991: 319). Implicit in this argument is the Kantian 'categorical imperative': the moral idea 'that we should treat people as ends and not means. States, however, should be treated as means and not ends' (Booth 1991: 319). In other words, people always come first; states are merely expedient instruments or tools that can be discarded if they are no longer useful.

In a similar vein, Andrew Linklater (1989) disputes the realist view of IR and offers an alternative emancipatory perspective to take its place (Box 3.17). Both Booth and Linklater claim that world politics can be constructed along these universal solidaristic lines, with IR theorists leading the way. Not only that: they also claim that this social movement away from the anarchical society based on states and power politics and towards a cosmopolitan idea of global human security is well under way. The consequence of that for IR is clear: realism is becoming obsolete as a theoretical approach for studying IR, and irrelevant as a practical attitude to world politics.

The realist response to such emancipatory critiques could be expected to include some of the following observations. Linklater's and Booth's declaration of the death of the independent state and thus of the anarchical state system, like the famous mistaken announcement of the death of Mark Twain, is premature. People across the world in their almost countless millions continue to cling to the state as their preferred form of political organization. We need only recall the powerful attraction of self-determination and political independence based on the state for the peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East during the demise of European colonialism and for the peoples of Eastern Europe during the demise of the Soviet empire. When states fragment—as in the case of Yugoslavia at the end of the

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BOX 3.17   Linklater's emancipatory vision of global politics

A new framework for world politics, based on:

1. the construction of a 'global legal and political system' which goes beyond the state and 'affords protection to all human subjects';

2. the decline of self-interest and competitiveness which, according to realist thinking, sustains the state and fosters international conflict and ultimately war;

3. the rise and spread of human generosity that transcends state boundaries and extends to people everywhere;

4. the consequent development of a community of humankind to which all people owe their primary loyalty.

Linklater (1989: 199)

Cold War—the fragments turn out to be new (or old) states—e.g., Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo. In historical terms all these major movements towards the sovereign state occurred recently—i.e., in the late twentieth or early twenty-first centuries. Security continues to be based primarily on the state and the state system. It is not based on a global political–legal organization—such an entity does not exist; nor is there any indication that it will exist in the foreseeable future.

Where security is based on other social organizations, such as the family or the clan, as sometimes happens in Africa and some other parts of the world, that is because the local state has failed as a security organization. People are trying to make the best of a bad situation. Their own state has failed them, but that does not mean they have given up on the state. What they want is what the people of many other countries already have: a developed and democratic state of their own. What they do not want is a 'global legal and political system' such as Linklater describes: that would be scarcely distinguishable from Western colonialism from which they have just escaped.

It is also necessary to mark the continuing significance of the major states. Realists underline the centrality of great powers in world politics. Great-power relations shape the international relations and influence the foreign policies of most other states. That is why realists concentrate their attention on the great powers. There is little reason to doubt that the United States, China, Japan, Russia, Germany, France, Britain, India, and a few other core states will continue to perform leading roles in world politics. There also is little reason to doubt that the people of the world depend on those states, before all others, for maintaining international peace and security. There is nobody else to provide that fundamental service.

Research Prospects and Programme

Realism is a theory, first about the security problems of sovereign states in an international anarchy, and second about the problem of international order. The normative core of realism is state survival and national security. If world politics continues to be organized on the basis of independent states with a small group of powerful states largely responsible for shaping the most important international events, then it seems clear that realism will continue to be an important IR theory. The only historical development that could render it obsolete is a world historical transformation that involved abandoning the sovereign state and the anarchical state system. That does not appear very likely in the foreseeable future.

This chapter has discussed the main strands of realism; a major distinction was made between classical realism on the one hand and strategic realism and neorealism on the other. Which strand of realism contains the most promising research programme? John Mearsheimer (1993) says that neorealism is a general theory that applies to other historical situations besides that of the Cold War. He argues that neorealism can be employed to predict the course of international history after the Cold War. We have noted that neorealism formulates a number of important questions about the distribution of power in the international system

and the power balancing of the leading powers. Yet we have also emphasized some limitations of neorealist theory, especially as regards the analysis of cooperation and integration in Western Europe after the end of the Cold War. Some neorealists think that these patterns of cooperation can be addressed without major difficulty through the further development of neorealist analysis (see for example Grieco 1997). From a more sceptical view, neorealism (and also strategic realism) appears closely tied to the special historical circumstances of the East–West conflict: (1) a bipolar system based on two rival superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union) each implacably opposed to the other and prepared to risk nuclear war for the sake of its ideology; (2) the development of nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them to any point on earth.

Since the end of the Cold War the Soviet Union has disappeared and the bipolar system has given way to one in which there are several major powers. The United States is arguably now the only superpower. With the rise of China the current pre-eminent position of the United States might be expected to come to an end at some point in the not too distant future. Nuclear weapons remain in existence, of course, but the tight Cold War controls on them may have been loosened. There is now a greater danger than before of the spread of nuclear weapons.

We believe that all the various strands of realism we have presented continue to have relevant insights to offer in the analysis of current international relations. But there are some important issues of the post-Cold War state system that the narrower focus of strategic realism and neorealism cannot so readily come to grips with. Among those are four key issues: (1) the emergence of the United States as an unrivalled great power following the demise of the Soviet Union, and the reduced significance of Russia as compared to its predecessor, the Soviet Union; (2) the threat posed by peripheral 'rogue states' which are prepared to threaten regional peace and security but are not in a position to threaten the global balance of power; (3) the problems posed by 'failed states' and the issue of great-power responsibility for the protection of human rights around the world; (4) the security crisis presented by acts of international terrorism, particularly the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington DC, which threaten the personal security of citizens more than either the national security of states or international peace and security.

We believe that leaves classical realism and neoclassical realism with the most promising future research programmes. A plausible research strategy for post-Cold War realism, therefore, would involve an attempt to understand the role of an unrivalled but also benign paramount power in an international system that must face several fundamental problems: the protection of global peace and security; the coming to grips with 'rogue states' and 'failed states' on the periphery of the state system; and the protection of citizens, particularly those of Western countries, from international terrorism. That research strategy would have to be revised, of course, with the emergence of China as a great power equal of the United States. That change would correspondingly invite a research strategy that focused centrally on bipolarity. Insofar as China has been transforming itself into a major player in the liberal world economy as well as a major player in international politics as a 'responsible' great power, this would not be a return to the bipolarity of the Cold War. Were that to happen, as seems likely, a research question for that emerging bipolar system might be: 'How does the new bipolarity differ from the Cold War bipolarity?'

KEY POINTS

- Realists usually have a pessimistic view of human nature. Realists are sceptical that there can be progress in international politics that is comparable to that in domestic political life. They operate with a core assumption that world politics consists of an international anarchy of sovereign states. Realists see international relations as basically conflictual, and they see international conflicts as ultimately resolved by war.

- Realists believe that the goal of power, the means of power, and the uses of power are central preoccupations of political activity. International politics is thus portrayed as 'power politics'. The conduct of foreign policy is an instrumental activity based on the intelligent calculation of one's power and one's interests as against the power and interests of rivals and competitors.

- Realists have a high regard for the values of national security, state survival, and international order and stability. They usually believe that there are no international obligations in the moral sense of the word—i.e., bonds of mutual duty—between independent states. For classical realists there is one morality for the private sphere and another and very different morality for the public sphere. Political ethics allows some actions that would not be tolerated by private morality.

- Realists place a great deal of importance on the balance of power, which is both an empirical concept concerning the way that world politics are seen to operate and a normative concept: it is a legitimate goal and a guide to responsible statecraft on the part of the leaders of the great powers. It upholds the basic values of peace and security.

- Structural realists employ the concepts bipolar system and multipolar system, and many see bipolarity as more conducive to international order.

- Neoclassical realists seek to combine the neorealist argument of Waltz with the classical realist arguments of Morgenthau and Kissinger. They also seek to incorporate the concept of domestic statehood and society which is a characteristic feature of liberalism.

- Some IR theorists employ the distinction between a hard balance of power and a soft balance of power. The former is the classical realist concept of a balance of military power between major powers. The latter, on the other hand, is a more recent conception of a many-faceted and more diverse balance of power.

- Schelling seeks to provide analytical tools for strategic thought. He views diplomacy and foreign policy, especially of the great powers and particularly the United States, as a rational–instrumental activity that can be more deeply understood by the application of a form of mathematical analysis called 'game theory'. Coercion is a method of bringing an adversary into a bargaining relationship and getting the adversary to do what we want him or her to do without having to compel it—i.e., employ brute force which, in addition to being dangerous, is usually far more difficult and far less efficient.

- Neorealism is an attempt to explain international relations in scientific terms by reference to the unequal capabilities of states and the anarchical structure of the state system, and by focusing on the great powers whose relations determine the most important 'outcomes' of international politics. A scientific theory of IR leads us to expect states to

behave in certain predictable ways. Waltz and Mearsheimer believe that bipolar systems are more stable and thus provide a better guarantee of peace and security than multipolar systems. According to that view, the Cold War was a period of international stability and peace.

- The International Society tradition is critical of realism on two counts. First, it regards realism as a one-dimensional IR theory that is too narrowly focused. Second, it claims that realism fails to capture the extent to which international politics is a dialogue of different IR voices and perspectives. Emancipatory theory claims that power politics is obsolete because security is now a local problem within disorganized and sometimes failed states, and at the same time is a cosmopolitan problem of people everywhere regardless of their citizenship. It is no longer exclusively or even primarily a problem of national security and national defence.

? QUESTIONS

- Realists are pessimistic about human progress and cooperation beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. What are the reasons given for that pessimism? Are they good reasons?
- Why do realists place so much emphasis on security? Does that make sense? How important is security in world politics?
- Identify the major differences between the classical realism of Hans Morgenthau and the neorealism of Kenneth Waltz. Which approach is best suited for analysing international relations after the Cold War?
- Outline the main arguments for and against NATO expansion. State your own position including supporting arguments.
- How does the new bipolarity differ from Cold War bipolarity?
- Does the concept of a soft balance of power make sense?
- Does the argument of neoclassical realism contain a basic contradiction?
- What is the emancipatory critique of realism? Does it make sense?

→ GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

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WEB LINKS

Web links mentioned in the chapter, together with additional material including a case-study on NATO expansion, can be found on the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book.

www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/jackson_sorensen5e/