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Structural Realism in a more complex world

CHARLES L. GLASER

The editors of the Review of International Studies have posed a timely challenge to what they term American realism. In broad terms, their editorial makes two points: first, realism has lost its relevance to current international policy; and second, realism does a poor job of explaining the behaviour of the world's major powers. In this brief essay I argue that both of these points are greatly overstated, if not simply wrong. At the same time, I accept that realism provides less leverage in addressing the full spectrum of issues facing the major powers in the post-Soviet and now the post-9/11 world than it did during the Cold War. However, this is neither surprising nor a serious problem, because scholars who use a realist lens to understand international politics can, and have, without inconsistency or contradiction also employed other theories to understand issues that fall outside realism's central focus.

Continuing relevance

To gauge whether realism has lost its relevance we can consider some of the central questions that realism attempts to answer: under what international conditions will major powers find that competitive policies are best for achieving their objectives? When is major-power war likely and when instead is peace likely to prevail? These questions would be uninteresting if the end of the Cold War had fundamentally transformed international relations, essentially guaranteeing cooperative and peaceful relations among the major powers.

But this is not the case. We are now enjoying a period of relative calm in major-power relations, but the possibility of major-power war has not been eliminated. Although ethnic conflict topped the international policy agenda for much of the 1990s and global-reach terrorism is the focus of today's attention, policymakers should continue to be concerned about relations between the major powers and the possibility of conflict. Given the scale of potential damage, taking major-power relations off the policy agenda would require their future to be still rosier than all but the most optimistic assessments suggest.

At a minimum, there is room for substantial disagreement over the future of major-power relations. There is wide but not full agreement on the future of good relations within Western Europe and between Western Europe and the United States. Relations between the West and Russia are promising, but still in transition;

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the possibility two decades down the road of a reinvigorated Russia that is engaged in renewed competition does not require a great stretch of imagination. Still more worrisome to most observers is the possibility that China's growing power will generate dangerous competition within northeast Asia and directly between China and the United States. Few observers appear confident that arms races and military conflicts can be avoided; some are quite pessimistic.[1] Although realism is not the only approach that is helpful for exploring the possibility of major-power conflict, comparing the probability across regions, and designing policies for reducing these dangers, its leverage on these issues should leave little doubt about its continuing relevance to international politics.

Moreover, although debates within realism may appear to be an intra-family feud that need not concern outsiders, the divergences are important to understand and resolve because the different strands of realism can provide quite different policy prescriptions.[2] For example, offensive realism tends to be pessimistic about the prospects for avoiding dangerous conflict and prescribes competitive policies for dealing with China, including policies to slow its economic growth,[3] as well as military policies that would extend China's conventional and nuclear inferiority. In contrast, defensive realists are more optimistic about the prospects for avoiding conflict, and call for more cautious, cooperative policies, including restraints on the integration of Japanese and American high technology capabilities and on the deployment of national missile defence.[4]

Explanatory power – does sustained unipolarity present problems?

Although initial realist evaluations of the longevity of American unipolarity were consistent with the editors' assessment[5] – states are likely to balance to offset US unipolarity – in fact two separate, reinforcing, lines of realist argument, suggest otherwise. The first argument focuses primarily on the distribution of power and stands squarely in the realist tradition. The second argument focuses on what states

[1] For a recent pessimistic evaluation of the prospects for major-power peace and cooperation, including within Europe, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2002), ch. 10.

[2] The fullest statement of offensive realism is Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*; on defensive realism see Charles L. Glaser, 'Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help', *International Security*, 19:3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 50–90; Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); and Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). For evaluations of this debate see Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, 'Security Seeking Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited', *International Security*, 25:3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 128–61; and Charles L. Glaser, 'The Natural and Necessary Evolution of Structural Realism', in Colin Elman and John Vasquez (eds.), *Realism and the Balancing of Power* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003).

[3] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 402.

[4] Thomas J. Christensen, 'China, the US–Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia', *International Security*, 23:4 (Spring 1999), pp. 49–80; and Charles L. Glaser and Steve Fetter, 'National Missile Defense and the Future of US Nuclear Weapons Policy', *International Security*, 26:1 (Summer 2001), pp. 40–92.

[5] See for example Christopher Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Arise', *International Security*, 17:4 (Spring 1993), pp. 5–51.

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know about each others' motives and intentions, and how this influences their military policies in general and their alliance policies more specifically.

The first argument holds that states are not balancing against the United States because they recognise that they cannot succeed. As presented forcefully by William Wohlforth, the US advantage in power is so large, clear and multi-dimensional that second-tier states recognise that balancing against the United States is likely to fail and, as a result, they will not try. The starting point for this argument is an appreciation of US power – the United States enjoys a power advantage that is unmatched in modern history, both in the overall size of its advantage and in the diversity of its predominant power, which includes economic, military and technological advantages. The US advantage is so large that no single country has a realistic chance of closing the gap for the foreseeable future; China has the best chance, but this is probably decades away. If not a rising state, then states balancing together against the United States may be the most likely way for unipolarity to be eliminated. But the extent of US power advantages poses severe problems for successful balancing. Not only do the major powers that could plausibly balance against the United States currently lack the resources to match the United States, but the inefficiencies of balancing would require an opposing coalition to have still greater resources. The resource gap is therefore larger than suggested by simply looking at states' individual resources. Moreover, geography favours the United States – it is distant and therefore poses a reduced threat. In contrast, efforts by major powers to offset American global hegemony are likely to provoke their neighbours, due to their closer proximity, to balance against them, which would in turn undermine balancing against the United States. Given these barriers and disincentives, Wohlforth concludes that we should not be surprised that the other major powers are not balancing against the United States.[6]

The second argument focuses on the information that states have about others' motives and holds that states are not balancing against the United States because they believe it is unnecessary. The major powers recognise that the United States is essentially a benign, security-seeking state; therefore, although extremely powerful, the United States does not pose a threat that warrants balancing against.[7] This is most clearly the case for the major powers of Western Europe and for Japan; they are now confident that the United States does not have ambitions that could lead them into a major-power war, or even into a severe conflict in which the threat of employing military force would determine the outcome. The Bush administration's shift to more unilateralist policies has angered European leaders[8] and may lead to increased European unity and defence spending. However, even if there is a growing divergence in American and European views on both ends and means, these

[6] William C. Wohlforth, 'The Stability of a Unipolar World', *International Security*, 24:1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5–41; and Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, 'American Primacy in Perspective', *Foreign Affairs*, 81:4 (July/August 2002), pp. 20–33.

[7] This follows from Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987); on this specific point see Charles A. Kupchan, 'After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration, and the Sources of a Stable Multipolarity', *International Security*, 23:2 (Fall 1998), pp. 46–7. On the role of domestic ideology in producing this information see John M. Owen, IV, 'Transnational Liberalism and US Primacy', *International Security*, 26: 3 (Winter 2001/02), pp. 117–52.

[8] Steven Erlanger, 'America the Invulnerable? The World Looks Again', *New York Times*, 21 July 2002, X1.

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disagreements are not raising doubts about America's basic motives and objectives. As a result, this more capable Europe would not be balancing against the United States, but instead striving to have a greater say in multilateral coordination with the United States and the capability to act independently if need be.

Among the major powers, China probably has the least positive and most uncertain view of American goals and faces a number of issues, most importantly Taiwan, over which armed conflict could occur. So, one could argue that China's failure to form a balancing coalition is a problem for the theory. But China does not have a good potential partner – Russia does not share its view of the American threat, although they may have common concerns about a limited number of issues, for example, national missile defence. We should therefore expect that China will engage in internal balancing – building up its own forces – at least until its relations with the United States have improved significantly. This is happening, not on a massive scale, but in ways and to a degree that are consistent with China's economic growth and the specific nature of its security concerns.

This information argument complements the unipolarity argument that focuses solely on power. If European states believed that the United States was malign and aggressive with an interest in controlling Europe, then America's power advantage would be unlikely to discourage Europe from balancing against it. A much more unified Europe would have the resources to make the world bipolar.[9] And the danger posed by the United States would likely give the European states sufficient incentives to overcome the barriers to efficient balancing, which have already been somewhat reduced by the EU's decision to pursue a common defence and security policy and possibly by a shared European identity.

A rejoinder to the preceding argument is that it is not a realist argument – that is, including information about other states' motives as a variable reaches beyond the theory's boundaries. Increasingly my view is that this type of information is an essential, albeit generally under-appreciated, component of realism, or at least of a more general theory that evolves deductively from structural realism and preserves its key features, which include taking systemic variables as exogenous and focusing on strategic interaction.[10] The best way to appreciate the organic nature of this type of information in a structural IR theory is to consider the security dilemma. The security dilemma is central to structural realism;[11] without it a system of rational states motivated solely by security would never generate security competition, arms races or war. And, uncertainty about other states' motives is an essential component of the security dilemma. Variation in a state's information about an opposing state's motives – both the information it possesses at the beginning of their interaction and the updated information that results from their interaction – influences the severity of the security dilemma and choices between competitive and cooperative policies. Therefore, whereas information about motives may appear to be an optional variable for assessing alliance choices, it is an essential variable when assessing the magnitude

[9] Wohlforth, 'The Stability of a Unipolar World', p. 31. Charles A. Kupchan, *The End of the American Era* (New York: Knopf, 2002) argues that, even without such a clear American threat, the EU is going to eliminate unipolarity.

[10] Charles L. Glaser, 'Information and Anarchy' (unpublished manuscript, August 2002).

[11] On the security dilemma see Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,' *World Politics*, 30: 2 (January 1978), pp. 167–214; Charles L. Glaser, 'The Security Dilemma Revisited', *World Politics*, 50:1 (October 1997), pp. 171–201; and Andrew Kydd, 'Game Theory and the Spiral Model', *World Politics*, 49:3 (April 1997), pp. 371–400.

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and implications of the security dilemma. Having recognised this point, including the same variable in analyses of alliance behaviour flows directly from this conception of the theory.

Security concerns outside of realism's focus – non-state threats

I agree that the realism is not the key theory for analysing some of the dangers that currently top the international security agenda. However, this is much less of an indictment of the theory than the RIS editorial suggests. Realism is designed to understand relations and interactions between states; we should not be surprised that it has less to tell us about non-state actors. It is also true that the threat posed by non-state actors, specifically terrorists, has increased in relative importance over the past decade, among other reasons because the probability of major-power war has decreased, the probability of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction has increased, and Al- Qaeda has emerged as an especially well organised, technically capable and murderous organisation.

However, this combination of points does not suggest the conclusion that realism is no longer useful, or that scholars who have worked with realist theories cannot analyse threats posed by non-states actors. As discussed at the beginning of this essay, the potential for conflict between states, including major powers, has not been eliminated. Realism, in its various strands, continues to provide important insights into these traditional security questions. Moreover, the current relative danger posed by terrorism and major-power conflict may not be a good indicator of the future. Although certainly a contentious question, future decades might once again see major-power conflict returning to the top of the international security agenda.

Maybe more important here, scholars who have developed and employed realist theories for understanding relations between states are not banned from using other types of theories and tools for analysing other types of dangers. Given the substantial differences between major powers and non-state actors, we should hardly be surprised that scholars would find that a theory that was initially developed to provide a parsimonious analysis of the interaction between states was inadequate for assessing interactions with and between non-state actors. Moreover, this is not simply a hypothetical possibility – scholars who are known for their contributions to realism have chosen not to restrict their analysis to realist arguments in addressing a range of topics involving non-state actors, including terrorism[12] and ethnic conflict.[13] At the same time, in some of this work scholars have effectively extended realist concepts to conflicts involving non-state actors, with prominent examples including the role of the security dilemma in generating ethnic violence;[14] the advantages of

[12] See for example, Barry R. Posen, 'The Struggle Against Terrorism: Grand Strategy, Strategy and Tactics' and Stephen M. Walt, 'Beyond bin Laden: Reshaping US Foreign Policy', both in *International Security*, 26:3 (Winter 2001/02).

[13] See for example Stephen Van Evera, 'Hypotheses on Nationalism and War', *International Security*, 18:4 (Spring 1994), pp. 5–39; and Jack L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000).

[14] For example, Barry R. Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict', *Survival*, 35:1 (Spring 1993), pp. 27–47.

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separation and partition for restoring peace and saving lives;[15] and the shortcomings of remaining neutral when intervening in an ethnic conflict, because taking sides may be necessary to end a deadly war.[16]

A related point connects this observation to earlier criticisms of scholars who are usually classified as realists. Many scholars who have worked with realism to analyse relations between states have not confined their research to a single type of theory or level of analysis. For example, scholars who have used defensive realism to establish the policies that a state should pursue have also drawn upon theories of suboptimal decision-making to explain more fully the policies that states have actually pursued.[17] These scholars are still frequently classified as realists and their entire body of work is classified as realism, which then fuels the criticism that realist theory is undermined because it has expanded to include many types of theory that lie outside its paradigmatic boundaries.[18]

This raises two issues that I can only touch on here. First, much of this criticism flows simply from questions of categorisation. We may want to label a scholar who has combined realism with different types of theories a 'realist', even though this label does not fully characterise the individual's research. But if we use this convention, we need to remember that it is a convenient shorthand, not an accurate description. Especially important for the issue at hand, when categorising theories, we need to be careful not to define realism in terms of all of the scholars who are termed realists. In other words, we should not conflate realism with the scholars who use it.

The second, and more important, issue concerns the rationale for and implications of combining realism with other types of theories to explain the behaviour of major powers. Because realism is designed to address the behaviour of states, the rationale is somewhat more complicated than the rationale, discussed above, for non-state actors. Structural realism is built on restrictive assumptions – including importantly that states are essentially rational actors – and does not attempt to explain the sources of states' motives, instead taking them as given. If these restrictions are not met – for example, states pursue suboptimal instead of rational policies – then realism remains valuable, but needs to be supplemented by a theory of suboptimal behaviour. If states misperceive their international environment, then structural realism would explain their strategic interaction, given their (mistaken) perceptions of the material environment, but could not explain their behaviour unless combined with a theory that explained the states' misperceptions. From one perspective this could be viewed as a defeat for the realist theory, since it does not explain everything. A more productive perspective, I believe, is to see the theories as complementary – fitting together logically and each explaining a central element of the states' behaviour. Similarly, if states' behaviour varies depending on their motives, then a still more complete theory would include a layer that explains basic motives.

[15] Chaim Kaufmann, 'Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars', *International Security*, 20:4 (1996), pp. 136–15; John J. Mearsheimer and Robert A. Pape, 'The Answer: A Partition Plan for Bosnia', *The New Republic* (14 June, 1993), pp. 22–5, 28; John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Van Evera, 'When Peace Means War', *The New Republic* (18 December, 1995), pp. 16–18, 21.

[16] Richard K. Betts, ' The Delusion of Impartial Intervention', *Foreign Affairs*, 73:6 (November/December 1994), pp. 20–33.

[17] Key examples include Van Evera, *Causes of War*; and Snyder, *Myths of Empire*.

[18] Jeffery W. Legro and Andrew Moracsik, 'Is Anyone Still a Realist', *International Security*, 24:2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5–55.

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In sum, realism is not an analytic straightjacket – whether analysing major powers, ethnic conflict or terrorism, so-called realists have drawn on a variety of theoretical tools to advance our understanding of important questions of international policy.

Realism and institutions

In my judgment the divide between neorealism and neoinstitutionalism has been exaggerated, which makes it less surprising that a realist analysis would predict states working through international organisations. The general argument is that international organisations can be understood largely as a means available to states for achieving their goals; when conditions facing a state make an international organisation the best means available, realism should predict that states will develop and use it.[19] This line of argument does not hold that institutions have an independent effect; instead they reflect states' interests and the constraints they face.[20] It does hold, however, that institutions matter – when an institution is the best means available, failing to help create it would reduce the state's security.

The rational states posited by structural realism should consider the full range of means available for achieving security, including building up military forces and engaging in arms races to gain military advantages, restraining their building of forces to avoid the dangers of the security dilemma, and developing international institutions to help make cooperation as safe and beneficial as possible. As institutional theory argues, international organisations can provide information that reduces the costs of cheating, can create efficiencies by reducing transactions costs and pooling resources, and can provide states with a vehicle for signalling their benign motives.[21] By realism's own logic (at least defensive realism's), each of these functions could help a state achieve its security goals.

As a result, at least in theory, international institutions can play a variety of roles in helping a major power manage its security relationships with other major powers in ways that are consistent with structural realism. When an arms control agreement has the potential to increase two countries' security, an international organisation can support the agreement by reducing the costs of cheating and providing a forum for clarifying the terms of the agreement and resolving disputes over contested actions.[22] When an alliance could contribute to a state's security, an international organisation can create efficiencies in the aggregating of power and can help to manage the security dilemma between alliance members that are not confident of

[19] Glaser, 'Realists as Optimists', pp. 79–85; and Robert Jervis, 'Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate', *International Security*, 24:1 (Summer 1999), pp. 42–63.

[20] Institutions may well have additional effects, but these are not captured by neorealism and rationalist theories more generally; constructivist theories focus on the ways in which institutions cannot be separated from states and the international environment; see Tomas Risse, 'Constructivism and International Institutions: Toward Conversations Across Paradigms', in Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner (eds.), Political Science: State of the Discipline (New York: Norton 2002).

[21] Celeste A. Wallander, *Mortal Friends, Best Enemies: German-Russian Cooperation after the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), ch. 2.

[22] A good example of the latter function is the Standing Consultative Commission that was established by the ABM Treaty.

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their partners' motives and intentions. NATO is widely recognised as having played this role during the Cold War and many analysts see a transformed NATO continuing to play this role. Concert-like arrangements can provide major powers with the opportunity to better coordinate and constrain their foreign policies on secondary issues, with the goal of enabling them to avoid signalling expansionist objectives, which would generate security competition over first-order issues.[23]

Consequently, given their potentially useful roles, debate over the value of institutions should focus more on their risks and benefits in specific international contexts. In evaluating the potential contribution of institutions, their value should be judged relative to the state's best policy alternative without the institution. Otherwise the value of institutions will be exaggerated, if states could have done almost as well without them, which is what some realists imply in arguing that states only turn to institutions when they face relatively benign international conditions. Structural realism provides a framework for making this assessment, emphasising the material constraints that the international system imposes and, as suggested above, can be extended to include the impact of states' information about others' motives.

International organisations can also help a major power deal with challenges posed by regional powers and ethnic conflict. When a major power has limited interests in a conflict – for example, an ethnic conflict in which the state has primarily humanitarian but not strategic interests – it may have sufficient resources to intervene effectively on its own, but its limited interests make it unwilling to do so, unless others join in the intervention. Multilateral cooperation enables the state to share the costs of involvement with other interested states, possibly reducing the state's own cost of intervention to a level that is commensurate with its interests. A state might also want to intervene with the approval of an established international organisation to help signal that it has limited goals and, therefore, that it is not a threat to other states in the region and to other major powers. Because the organisation could refuse to approve the intervention, working through the organisation enables the state to demonstrate its willingness to be constrained by other states' preferences.[24]

While recognizing these possible purposes, the claim that states 'must' now collaborate with international organisations, implying that the need has increased since the end of the Cold War, is much less clear. First, its overwhelming power and the current lack of major-power threats reduce the importance for the United States of institutionalised security cooperation with key allies – in Europe and Asia – and of negotiated arms control agreements with potential adversaries – for example, Russia. This is not to argue that the United States should halt cooperation in these areas, among other reasons because its policies should be designed to reduce the development of future threats through a variety of types of reassurance. Therefore, I favour preserving America's major-power alliances and believe the United States

[23] Even a collective security organisation designed to provide security to egoist states is consistent with structural realism, but its risks would exceed its benefits under all but a very narrow set of conditions, leading realists to be especially critical of its prospects for success. Social constructivists have turned to collective identities to solve this problem; see Alexander Wendt, 'Collective Identity Formation and the International State', *American Political Science Review*, 88:2 (June 1994), pp. 384–96.

[24] Alexander S. Thompson, 'Channeling Power: International Organizations and the Politics of Coercion' (Ph.D thesis, University of Chicago, 2001).

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should have been willing to make larger concessions on renegotiation of the ABM Treaty and on the Moscow agreement limiting nuclear forces. Nevertheless, while still important, these forms of major-power cooperation, which were central to protecting vital US security interests during the Cold War, are now less essential.

Second, willingness to work through international organisations should not be confused with necessity. In some cases, the United States prefers to work through an international organisation, but would act on its own if it could not gain institutional support. In the Gulf War the United States sought and received UN approval. However, if the United States had known that it would not receive this approval, it might well have acted on its own. Similarly, the United States has the option of shopping among existing organisations, trying to balance the larger benefits of a more inclusive multilateral organisation against the greater probability of being constrained. The United States did not request UN authorisation for the Kosovo war, because the prospects of receiving it were recognised to be poor, and instead chose to work through NATO. When choosing among organisations is an option, a decision to work through the larger more inclusive organisation may not reflect a willingness to accept its constraints, but instead prior confidence that they would not be imposed.

In addition, in important cases the United States has chosen to act essentially on its own, with the war in Afghanistan and Iraq being the clearest recent example. In Afghanistan, the United States received help from many states, both major-power allies and regional states, but did not work through an international organisation. Still more important here is the US decision to launch a preventive war against Iraq. The United States decided to work through the United Nations, but eventually acted without the endorsement of the Security Council. This case demonstrates that when the stakes are high enough, lack of approval from a key international organisation, and even quite sharp rejection of US policy preferences by a number of major powers, can be insufficient to prevent the United States from acting on its own and pursuing policies that violate widely accepted norms.

Although its decision to work through the United Nations might at first appear to suggest otherwise, in fact US policy has been entirely consistent with the preceding argument. The United States demonstrated its preference for broad international backing and the support of international organisations by investing time and effort in getting a Security Council resolution demanding that Iraq give up its weapons of mass destruction. However, although desirable, UN approval was not necessary. The United States' willingness to act without UN approval did not come as a surprise – the Bush administration maintained throughout the UN debate that, if the Security Council failed to pass a satisfactory resolution, the United States would act without one,[25] and in the end the United States launched the war without getting a second UN resolution. The puzzle in this case seems to run in the opposite direction – given that the United States made clear its willingness to act on its own and used this willingness to negotiate a resolution that met the majority of US requirements – why were so many states significantly reassured by the US decision to strive for and achieve the first UN resolution?

[25] 'Now reel him in', *The Economist*, 16–22 November, 2002, p. 9.

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My point here is not that realism necessarily calls for unilateral action in these cases[26] – some realist arguments point in the opposite direction. Realism does, however, offer a simple explanation, if not the only explanation, for why the United States often does not have to work through international organisations – its has the power to act alone and will do so when protecting important security interests requires it.

Ethical agendas and political order

States' concern for international humanitarian and political ideological issues is often taken as evidence that realism is a poor guide to state behaviour and a flawed theory. According to this line of argument, realism holds that states do not care about these issues and, closely related, should not care about them. Critics therefore argue that realism is undermined when states act to protect these types of interests. Structural realism, however, provides greater leeway for pursuing humanitarian and ideological interests than this critique allows. The much greater prominence on the post-Cold War foreign policy agenda of efforts to spread democracy and protect human rights is entirely consistent with the predictions of structural realism.

Structural realism assumes that states give top priority to achieving security. An extreme formulation is that states pursue policies that *maximise* their security. They are unwilling to trade any security to pursue other values and because all policies require some resources states therefore only pursue security. However, a less extreme and more reasonable formulation, which preserves structural realism's central focus, assigns clear priority to security, but does not make it a state's only objective. In this formulation, states can pursue a variety of non-security objectives, but only once they have achieved a high level of security or when pursuing these other objectives would not detract from their ability to pursue security.

Although the theory does not tell us exactly where the tradeoff between security and non-security objectives occurs, we expect that as a state's security increases it will have greater leeway to pursue other objectives. For example, after the Cold War, NATO could afford to place much greater weight on spreading democracy, partly because security threats were greatly reduced and partly because the risks of spreading democracy were greatly reduced.[27] In contrast, during the Cold War NATO invested little in spreading democracy in central Europe, because the security challenges posed by the Soviet Union required focusing on the military dangers and because determined efforts to spread democracy would have been extremely risky, requiring the roll-back of Soviet control. Human rights and humanitarian intervention can be understood to have gained prominence for similar reasons. With the end of the Cold War, the lack of pressing security threats has allowed the Western powers

[26] For a provocative argument about how US power generates purposes that require it to be willing to use it capabilities unilaterally see Robert Kagan, 'Power and Weakness', *Policy Review* (June 2002).

[27] This said, there were disagreements about whether NATO expansion should be guided by the desire to spread democracy; disagreements focused on the costs of expansion, with opponents worrying about provoking Russia, and on the benefits, with opponents questioning the impact on the solidification of democracy.

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to devote greater political attention and material resources to resolving ethnic conflicts. In comparison, during the Cold War, regional conflicts were viewed in strategic instead of humanitarian terms and the major powers were much more reluctant to divert substantial military forces to protect human rights, because they relied more heavily on these forces for protecting their vital security interests. The recent US decision to restore training aid to the Indonesian military can be understood in a similar way.[28] During the early 1990s the United States entirely cut off this type of aid due to concern over human rights abuses. Now, however, seeing much larger security threats from Islamic terrorist groups, the United States is more willing to work with an organisation that has a bad human rights record.

Similar types of arguments apply to potential tradeoffs between domestic goals and security. Even if a state's only international goal was achieving security, this would not mean that it would be willing to spend all its resources on achieving security. A pure security seeker could value consumption, as well as security, and therefore see a tradeoff between investing in military forces that would increase its security and consuming the resources that would be required to acquire these forces.[29]

Structural realism, while not unconditionally opposed to a state pursuing non-security interests, does not offer guidance on what ethical agenda states should pursue or on the sources of these policies when states do pursue them. One approach for filling this gap is to analyse these questions separately from structural realism, developing a complementary set of arguments that apply when a state's security situation allows it to pursue non-security objectives.[30] An alternative approach, which Barry Buzan suggests, is to create a single theory that integrates key strengths of the English School – specifically attention to world society and its relationship to international society – with structural realism.[31]

Although structural realism is silent on this broader foreign policy agenda,[32] it is important to emphasise again that scholars who work from a realist perspective have addressed this category of policy questions, including ethnic conflict and alternatives for intervention, reflecting their interest in and concern about issues that go beyond the security of the major powers and of states more generally. Structural realism

[28] Todd S. Purdum, 'US to Resume Aid to Train Indonesia's Military Forces', *New York Times*, 3 August 2002, p. 3.

[29] Consequently, models that include a tradeoff between security and consumption – for example, the guns vs. butter model in Robert Powell, *In The Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), ch. 2 – are consistent with structural realism.

[30] Examples could include Morton M. Halperin and David J. Scheffer, *Self-determination in a New World Order* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1992); and Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Katherine Sikkink (eds.), *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[31] Barry Buzan, 'From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School', *International Organization*, 47:3 (Summer 1993), esp. pp. 351–2; Buzan, 'The English School: An Underexploited Resource in IR', *Review of International Studies*, 27 (2001), esp. pp. 486–7; see also Iver B. Neumann, 'The English School and the Practices of World Society', *Review of International Studies*, 27 (2001), esp. pp. 505–6.

[32] On the role of moral and ethical considerations in the work of earlier realists, see Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1986), pp. 234–8.

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may be silent on the nature of solutions to these issues, but many scholars who are classified as realists have not been.

A final point, and a good one to conclude with, concerns the prospects for order and peaceful relations. The RIS editorial implies that the 'English School' with its emphasis on international society sees greater potential for order than does realism, which 'remains a world-view where states and power rule', and that the former's vision appears to be the better matched with international politics since the end of the Cold War. However, while its emphasis on international society, international law and norms might suggest that states will have good prospects for cooperating effectively to avoid military competition and war, and possibly that cooperation will be easy to achieve and maintain, my reading of the English School does not provide such an optimistic vision. The order that is essential to international society can be provided by the balance of power, which may require preventive war. International law, while helping states manage their interactions, is importantly backed up by the balance of power. And war is among the institutions that states rely upon to pursue their common goals, and has played a major role in European international society over the past few centuries.[33] Little is said about what distinguishes an international society in which major-power war is likely from one in which it is unlikely.

In contrast, structural realism does identify the conditions under which peace is likely to prevail, states will prefer to cooperate instead of compete, and political relations between the major powers will be quite good. Analyses of American's current unipolarity explain why we see so little balancing against the United States. Defensive realism explains both when material conditions encourage peace and when they enable states to signal their benign motives, thereby building improved relations. These arguments can be advanced further by addressing the information about motives that states have at the beginning of their interaction. I have touched on these points already, and do not have the space to develop them further. The point to make here is that realism, while not providing a complete explanation, does still explain a great deal of major-power politics, including the possibility of peaceful and cooperative relations between the major powers.

[33] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

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