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# INTERNATIONAL POLITICS



Anarchy, Force, Political Economy,  
and Decision Making

SECOND EDITION



# International Politics

Anarchy, Force,  
Political Economy, and  
Decision-Making

SECOND EDITION

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Twelve years ago, in our preface to the first edition of this reader, we wrote the following:

The multifariousness of the field of international politics is well known to those who have long studied it. How the field is defined, how it should be defined, what, in the sense of explanatory and predictive yield, are the most useful techniques and methods of approach—these are questions about which we have thought much and debated furiously and that we will probably never settle.

Having said that, however, we went on to design a reader for beginning students because we believed that there was more consensus among workers in our field about the basics of international politics than was usually admitted. We still believe that to be the case.

In fashioning the second edition, we have kept in mind the three principles that guided us in the first.

1. The topics treated here do not cover the whole field, nor do the selections exhaust the chosen subjects. But the topics selected do represent basic ones that most of us cover in our introductory courses, and the readings chosen do represent the minimum that should be said about each topic.
2. The selections are mainly analytical in content and are intended to confront the student with the nature and dilemmas of international political action.
3. Taken as a whole, the selections can be used either as the core around which an introductory course may be designed, or as a primary supplement to an assigned text.

What is new in the second edition, then, is not the principles of selection but the selections themselves. We have retained only eight of the readings we chose twelve years ago. The second edition is, therefore, a new book. We have kept Parts One and Two of the first edition, on the anarchic environment and the uses of force, though more than half of the selections in them are new. We have taken account of the rapid development of the area of political economy over the last ten years by devoting Part Three to it. And we have included a section on decision-making (Part Four) that deals with the perceptual, rational, and bureaucratic dimensions of the subject. Anarchy,

force, political economy, and decision-making—these are the four major themes around which the second edition has been constructed.

Finally, we have followed the practice of the first edition for each major section. Each of the four parts begins with a short editors' essay that analyzes the central concepts the student must master, organizes the selections, and relates them to one another.

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## **Part One**

### **The Anarchic Environment**



## THE MEANING OF ANARCHY

Unlike domestic politics, international politics takes place in an arena that has no central governing body. No agency exists above the individual states with authority and power to make laws and settle disputes. States can make commitments and treaties, but no sovereign power ensures compliance and punishes deviations. This is what is meant by the anarchic environment of international politics—the absence of a supreme power. Anarchy is therefore said to constitute a “state of war”: when all else fails, force is the *ultima ratio*—the final and legitimate arbiter of disputes among states.

The state of war, however, does not mean that every nation is constantly at the brink of war or actually at war with other nations. Most countries, though, do feel threatened by some states at some time; and every state has experienced periods of intense insecurity. No two contiguous states, moreover, have had a history of close, friendly relations uninterrupted by severe tension if not outright war. Because a nation cannot look to a supreme body to enforce laws, nor always count on other nations for aid and support, it must rely on its own efforts, particularly for defense against attack. Coexistence in an anarchic environment thus requires “self-help.” The psychological outlook that self-help breeds is best described by a saying common among British statesmen since Palmerston: “Great Britain has no permanent enemies or permanent friends; she has only permanent interests.”

Although states must provide the wherewithal to achieve their own ends, they do not always reach their foreign policy goals. The goals may be grandiose: the means available, meager. The goals may be attainable; the means selected, inappropriate. But even if the goals are realistic and the means both available and appropriate, a state can be frustrated in pursuit of its ends. The reason is simple, but fundamental to an understanding of international politics: what one state does will inevitably impinge on some other states—on some beneficially, but on others adversely. What one state desires another may covet. What one thinks its just due another may find threatening. Steps that a state takes to achieve its goals may be rendered useless by the countersteps that others take. No state, therefore, can afford to disregard the effects that its actions will have on other nations’ behavior. In this sense state behavior is contingent: what one state does is dependent in part upon what others do. Mutual dependence means that each must take the others into account. Kenneth Waltz

explores this point more fully and shows why "in anarchy there is no automatic harmony."

Mutual dependence affects nothing more powerfully than it does security—the measures states take to protect their territory. Like other foreign policy goals, the security of one state is contingent upon the behavior of other states. Herein lies the "security dilemma" to which each state is subject: in its efforts to preserve or enhance its own security, one state can take measures that decrease the security of other states and that cause them in turn to take countermeasures that neutralize the actions of the first state and that may even menace it. The first state may feel impelled to take additional actions that will provoke additional countermeasures... and so forth. The security dilemma means that an action-reaction spiral can occur between two states or among several of them so that each is forced to spend even larger sums on arms and be no more secure than before. All will run faster merely to stay where they were.

At the heart of the security dilemma are these two constraints: the inherent difficulty in distinguishing between offensive and defensive postures and the inability of one state to bank on the fact that another state's present pacific intentions will remain so. The capability to defend can also provide the capability to attack. In adding to its arms, state A may know that its aim is defensive, that its intentions are peaceful, and therefore that it has no aggressive designs on state B. In a world where states must look to themselves for protection, however, B will examine A's actions carefully and suspiciously. B may think that A will attack him when A's arms become powerful enough and that A's protestations of friendship are designed to lull him into lowering his guard. But even if B believes A's actions are not directed against him, B cannot assume that A's intentions will remain peaceful. B must allow for the possibility that what A can do to him A sometime might do. The need to assess capabilities along with intentions, or, the equivalent, to allow for a change in intentions, makes statesmen profoundly conservative. They prefer to err on the side of safety: to have too much rather than too little. Because security is the basis of existence and the prerequisite for the achievement of all other goals, statesmen must be acutely sensitive to the security actions of others. The security dilemma thus means that statesmen cannot risk *not* reacting to the security actions of other states, but that in so reacting, they can produce circumstances that leave them worse off than before.

The anarchic environment of international politics, then, allows every state to be the final judge of its own interests, but requires that each provide the means to attain them. Because the absence of a central authority permits wars to occur, security considerations become paramount. Because of the effects of the security dilemma, efforts of statesmen to protect their peoples can lead to severe tension and war even when all parties sincerely desire peace. Two states, or two groups of states, may each be satisfied with the status quo and seek only security, but not achieve it. Conflicts and wars with no economic or ideological basis can occur. The outbreak of war, therefore, does not necessarily mean that some or all states seek expansion, or that men have an innate drive for power. That states go to war when none of them wants to, however, does not imply that they never seek war. The security dilemma

may explain some wars; it does not explain all wars. States often do experience conflicts of interest over trade, real estate, ideology, and prestige. For example, when someone asked Francis I what differences led to his constant wars with Charles V, he replied: "None whatever. We agree perfectly. We both want control of Italy!" (Cited in Frederick L. Schuman, *International Politics*, 7th ed., New York, 1953, p. 283.) If states cannot obtain what they want by blackmail, bribery, or threats, they may resort to war. Wars can occur when no one wants them; wars do occur when someone wants them.

In an anarchic condition the better question to ask is not, "Why does war occur?" but, "Why does war not occur more frequently than it does?" If international relations are in a state of war, why are not more nations destroyed? Two answers are explored in the first section. Hedley Bull points out why nations are not as vulnerable as individuals—why they can suffer much and still survive. Arnold Wolfers shows why security, being costly, competes with a nation's other goals and hence why limits are put on its security efforts. The meaning of anarchy—for each state and for the way states relate to each other—is the starting point for an understanding of international relations.

### THE ESCAPES FROM ANARCHY

Many people have tried to escape from the difficulties that an anarchic environment creates. In the past, two solutions have been advocated: "harmony of interests" and world government. The first implies that the nature of the state system need not determine state behavior; the second, that it must determine it. The first solution therefore leaves the anarchic environment unchanged, but tries to alter state behavior by pointing out the mutual advantages of cooperation. The second solution, because it denies that lasting cooperation can occur within anarchy, changes the environment in order to alter behavior.

The argument adduced most often by the harmony of interests school is the economic one. It has two possible variants. First, nations should refrain from waging war and instead engage in trading freely because each will gain much more. Or, second, modern industrialized economics are so interdependent that no nation can wage war without severe disruptions and ultimate collapse. The first variant stresses the advantages of not fighting; the second, the disadvantages in fighting. The slogan of the first becomes "make trade not war"; that of the second, "war cannot pay." Fundamentally, both argue that prevention of war is a problem not of environment but of perception. If all states would only realize where their true interests lie, they would immediately favor peace. The task becomes merely one of education: to recognize the underlying harmony is to accept it and act accordingly.

In addition to the economic argument, the harmony of interests school finds other bases for cooperation. In the early part of this century, for example, European socialists argued that war benefitted only the ruling classes and therefore that the workers of all nations had no interests to be served by fighting one another. These men pledged to refrain from war, a pledge that failed in 1914 as national loyalties overrode the bonds of international class solidarity. Another basis for international

cooperation is the belief that democratic states are inherently peaceful. Woodrow Wilson in 1917 was only echoing the profound conviction of many nineteenth century liberals when he said that the United States was forced to enter the war "to make the world safe for democracy." He believed, as they did, that democracies will fight only in self-defense.

As the class interest and pacific democracy arguments demonstrate, however, the harmony of interests doctrine has serious flaws. What happens when national loyalties prove stronger than the existing bonds and perceived benefits of international cooperation? What attractiveness is there to a position that must argue that "to make the world safe for democracy" the world must be made democratic by total war if necessary? What basis is there for belief in an underlying harmony if some states consistently value other goals above peace? What do we do, in short, if we find that some states (or all) fail to perceive an underlying harmony? Do we opt for more education, or do we abandon the tenet of an underlying harmony? These are the types of questions that E. H. Carr asks of the harmony of interests school. He examines the doctrine, finds it wanting, and concludes that it is advocated by states that have gained power and privilege and that would therefore like to freeze the status quo.

The other path out of anarchy is world government. If the harmony of interests school is wrong, if the problem is not one of perception but of environment, then the only logical solution is to reshape it, to provide government where none has existed. A world governed by a supreme power would yield all of the benefits that one without it cannot give. Laws would be made and enforced by the central government. Force would not be the prerogative of the individual states; it would be the monopoly of the supreme power. Order would reign; peace would prevail.

Given the clear advantages of world government, the obvious question is, "Why do we not have it?" The answer is complex. It depends on timing—which states would give up how much of their independent powers at what times; on consensus—all states must agree that they have more to gain by submitting to a common power than they would lose by not doing so; on costs—whether a world war would be required in order to institute a world government, in which case the taking of the cure may kill the patient; and finally, on fear—such a body might possess so much power that it could easily become despotic, in which case the solution would be worse than the problem. For all these reasons, it has not yet been possible to achieve the one permanent solution to anarchy. But perhaps the urgency of the world's problems today will convince people that only through much greater cooperation, short of world government, is the survival of humanity possible. In this vein, Johansen argues that "a humane world community" is both necessary and possible. Only by considering values which cross national borders can we deal with problems of peace, scarcity, and pollution. Traditional solutions such as alliances and even familiar if unrealized ideas, such as world government, are inadequate. Instead, though some power must be placed in the hands of a centralized body, other power must be diffused downward to groups within states. The image is an alluring one, but whether such a radical alteration of prevailing patterns is possible is obviously an open question.

## THE MITIGATION OF ANARCHY

If the bonds of common interest among states are insufficient for escape from the anarchic environment, or if the mechanics have proved insurmountable, then statesmen and scholars must look to less ambitious schemes in order to regulate the affairs of states. If anarchy cannot be abolished, perhaps its effects can be mitigated. Jervis argues that the effects of anarchy are not constant. Depending on a state's preferences and beliefs about what others are likely to do, the advantages of cooperation may be high while the costs of others taking advantage of the state may be low. When this is the case, states often can work together without a central authority. Cooperation can thus happen in an anarchic environment. Jervis spells out the precise conditions when this can occur.

### *Established Techniques*

In the past, two specific devices—international law and diplomacy—have proved useful in resolving conflicts among states. Although not enforced by a world government, international law can provide norms for behavior and mechanisms for settling disputes. The effectiveness of international law derives from the willingness of states to observe it. Its power extends no further than the disposition of states "to agree to agree." Where less than vital interests are at stake, statesmen may accept settlements that are not entirely satisfactory because they think the precedents or principles justify the compromises made. Much of international law reflects a consensus among states on what is of equal benefit to all, as, for example, the rules regulating international communications. Diplomacy too can facilitate cooperation and resolve disputes. Particularly if diplomacy is skillful, that is, if the legitimate interests of the parties in dispute are taken into account, understandings can often be reached on issues that might otherwise lead to war. These points and others are explored more fully by Stanley Hoffmann and Hans Morgenthau.

Statesmen use these two traditional tools within a balance of power system. Much maligned by President Wilson and his followers and often misunderstood by many others, balance of power refers to the manner in which stability can be the outcome of the efforts of individual states, whether or not any or all of them deliberately pursue that goal. Just as Adam Smith argued that if every individual pursued his own self-interest, the interaction of individual egoisms would enhance national wealth, so international relations theorists have argued that even if every state seeks power at the expense of the others, no one state will likely dominate. In both cases a general good can be the unintended product of selfish individual actions. Even if most states, moreover, desire only to keep what they have, their own interests dictate that they band together in order to resist any state or coalition of states that threatens to dominate them.

The balance of power system is likely to prevent any one state's acquiring hegemony. It will not, however, benefit all states equally nor maintain the peace permanently. Rewards will be unequal because of inequalities in power and expertise. Wars will occur because they are one of the means by which states can preserve what

they have or acquire what they covet. Small states may even be eliminated by their more powerful neighbors. As Inis Claude points out, equilibrium, not peace, is the product of a balance of power system.

### *Postwar Innovations*

Law, diplomacy, and the balancing of power have been used historically in order to meliorate the harsher effects of anarchy. With two costly world wars behind them and with the potentially catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons in front of them, postwar statesmen have tried to devise new ways of regulating conflict. Probably the most striking innovation of post-war politics is bi-polarity. In the past, there were four or five states of roughly equal power. But since 1945, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. have been the superpowers—the two states which tower above the others in terms of material resources and international influence throughout the globe. Many scholars believe that this development increases tensions and makes war more likely. But Waltz argues that, to the contrary, the fact that there are only two world powers makes it easier for them to manage world problems. They know that they cannot expect others to take up the burden if they do not do so. And so they are compelled to see that at least a modicum of order is maintained in the world.

The readings in Part I are thus designed to present the enduring concepts and phenomena of the international political environment. The selections by no means exhaust the subject, but they do treat the central thoughts on it crisply and concisely. Anarchy is the fundamental fact of international relations. To deal with its consequences, or to alter it, one must first understand it.

# THE MEANING OF ANARCHY

Kenneth N. Waltz

## Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power

### Political Structures

Only through some sort of systems theory can international politics be understood. To be a success, such a theory has to show how international politics can be conceived of as a domain distinct from the economic, social, and other international domains that one may conceive of. To mark international-political systems off from other international systems, and to distinguish systems-level from unit-level forces, requires showing how political structures are generated and how they affect, and are affected by, the units of the system. How can we conceive of international politics as a distinct system? What is it that intervenes between interacting units and the results that their acts and interactions produce? To answer these questions, this chapter first examines the concept of social structure and then defines structure as a concept appropriate for national and for international politics.

A system is composed of a structure and of interacting units. The structure is the system-wide component that makes it possible to think of the system as a whole. The problem is...to contrive a definition of structure free of the attributes and the interactions of units. Definitions of structure must leave aside, or abstract from, the characteristics of units, their behavior, and their interactions. Why must those obviously important matters be omitted? They must be omitted so that we can distinguish between variables at the level of the units and variables at the level of the system. The problem is to develop theoretically useful concepts to replace the vague and varying systemic notions that are customarily employed— notions such as environment, situation, context, and milieu. Structure is a useful concept if it gives clear and fixed meaning to such vague and varying terms.

We know what we have to omit from any definition of structure if the definition is to be useful theoretically. Abstracting from the attributes of units means leaving aside

From Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, © 1979, Addison-Wesley, Reading, Massachusetts, pp. 79–106. Reprinted with permission. Portions of the text and some footnotes have been omitted.

questions about the kinds of political leaders, social and economic institutions, and ideological commitments states may have. Abstracting from relations means leaving aside questions about the cultural, economic, political, and military interactions of states. To say what is to be left out does not indicate what is to be put in. The negative point is important nevertheless because the instruction to omit attributes is often violated and the instruction to omit interactions almost always goes unobserved. But if attributes and interactions are omitted, what is left? The question is answered by considering the double meaning of the term "relation." As S. F. Nadel points out, ordinary language obscures a distinction that is important in theory. "Relation" is used to mean both the interaction of units and the positions they occupy vis-à-vis each other.<sup>1</sup> To define a structure requires ignoring how units relate with one another (how they interact) and concentrating on how they stand in relation to one another (how they are arranged or positioned). Interactions, as I have insisted, take place at the level of the units. How units stand in relation to one another, the way they are arranged or positioned, is not a property of the units. The arrangement of units is a property of the system.

By leaving aside the personality of actors, their behavior, and their interactions, one arrives at a purely positional picture of society. Three propositions follow from this. First, structures may endure while personality, behavior, and interactions vary widely. Structure is sharply distinguished from actions and interactions. Second, a structural definition applies to realms of widely different substance so long as the arrangement of parts is similar.<sup>2</sup> Third, because this is so, theories developed for one realm may with some modification be applicable to other realms as well....

The concept of structure is based on the fact that units differently juxtaposed and combined behave differently and in interacting produce different outcomes. I first want to show how internal political structure can be defined. In a book on international-political theory, domestic political structure has to be examined in order to draw a distinction between expectations about behavior and outcomes in the internal and external realms. Moreover, considering domestic political structure now will make the elusive international-political structure easier to catch later on.

Structure defines the arrangement, or the ordering, of the parts of a system. Structure is not a collection of political institutions but rather the arrangement of them. How is the arrangement defined? The constitution of a state describes some parts of the arrangement, but political structures as they develop are not identical with formal constitutions. In defining structures, the first question to answer is this: What is the principle by which the parts are arranged?

Domestic politics is hierarchically ordered. The units—institutions and agencies—stand vis-à-vis each other in relations of super- and subordination. The ordering principle of a system gives the first, and basic, bit of information about how the parts of a realm are related to each other. In a polity the hierarchy of offices is by no means completely articulated, nor are all ambiguities about relations of super- and subordination removed. Nevertheless, political actors are formally differentiated according to the degrees of their authority, and their distinct functions are specified. By "specified" I do not mean that the law of the land fully describes the duties that



different agencies perform, but only that broad agreement prevails on the tasks that various parts of a government are to undertake and on the extent of the power they legitimately wield. Thus Congress supplies the military forces; the President commands them. Congress makes the laws; the executive branch enforces them; agencies administer laws; judges interpret them. Such specification of roles and differentiation of functions is found in any state, the more fully so as the state is more highly developed. The specification of functions of formally differentiated parts gives the second bit of structural information. This second part of the definition adds some content to the structure, but only enough to say more fully how the units stand in relation to one another. The roles and the functions of the British Prime Minister and Parliament, for example, differ from those of the American President and Congress. When offices are juxtaposed and functions are combined in different ways, different behaviors and outcomes result, as I shall shortly show.

The placement of units in relation to one another is not fully defined by a system's ordering principle and by the formal differentiation of its parts. The standing of the units also changes with changes in their relative capabilities. In the performance of their functions, agencies may gain capabilities or lose them. The relation of Prime Minister to Parliament and of President to Congress depends on, and varies with, their relative capabilities. The third part of the definition of structure acknowledges that even while specified functions remain unchanged, units come to stand in different relation to each other through changes in relative capability.

A domestic political structure is thus defined, first, according to the principle by which it is ordered; second, by specification of the functions of formally differentiated units; and third, by the distribution of capabilities across those units. Structure is a highly abstract notion, but the definition of structure does not abstract from everything. To do so would be to leave everything aside and to include nothing at all. The three-part definition of structure includes only what is required to show how the units of the system are positioned or arranged. Everything else is omitted. Concern for tradition and culture, analysis of the character and personality of political actors, consideration of the conflictive and accommodative processes of politics, description of the making and execution of policy—all such matters are left aside. Their omission does not imply their unimportance. They are omitted because we want to figure out the expected effects of structure on process and of process on structure. That can be done only if structure and process are distinctly defined.

I defined domestic political structures first by the principle according to which they are organized or ordered, second by the differentiation of units and the specification of their functions, and third by the distribution of capabilities across units. Let us see how the three terms of the definition apply to international politics.

### *1. Ordering Principles*

Structural questions are questions about the arrangement of the parts of a system. The parts of domestic political systems stand in relations of super- and subordination. Some are entitled to command; others are required to obey. Domestic systems are