



# **Understanding International Relations**

**Third Edition**

**Chris Brown with Kirsten Ainley**

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macmillan



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**UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

## **Also by Chris Brown**

*International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches*

*Political Restructuring in Europe (editor)*

*International Relations in Political Thought (editor with Terry Nardin and N.J. Rengger)*



# Preface to the Third Edition

The most important change to the third edition of *Understanding International Relations* is that this is now a collaborative book. Kirsten Ainley wrote Chapter 11, revised Chapters 2–6, carried out bibliographical work for the entire book, and read and commented on every chapter. This collaboration has worked remarkably well; Kirsten has produced an outstanding chapter, and the book as a whole is much improved by her contribution. In short, this is now her book as well as mine, although, since the basic structure and many of its idiosyncrasies are inherited from earlier editions, I remain, in the last resort, solely responsible for its content.

CHRIS BROWN

In the Preface to the last edition a fuller account of globalization in future editions was promised and we hope we have delivered on this promise in the third edition. However, the second edition was published in the Spring of 2001, six months before the attacks on America on 9/11; just for once, the cliché is appropriate – things really will never be the same again, and inevitably this third edition reflects the fallout from 9/11 and its causes which, of course, are by no means unconnected to the processes we summarize as globalization.

Chapters 1 to 6 – which trace the history of the discourse of International Relations (IR) and its core concepts – remain more or less as in previous editions, with a few additional illustrations and examples, and fully updated guides to further reading. Chapters 7–9, ‘Global Governance’, ‘The Global Economy’ and ‘Globalization’, reorganize material to be found spread over five chapters of the last edition. Some purely historical material has been eliminated, and there has been some pruning, but this change is largely a matter of reorganization rather than extensive cutting. One substantive change is that there is no longer a chapter devoted to the South. This is a deliberate move as the category of the South no longer makes sense in terms of either the world economy or of world political, social or cultural factors. However, it must be stressed that this does not mean that issues of global inequality are neglected, that the problems of poorer countries are sidelined, or that theories of international relations that address these problems are marginalized. On the contrary, such issues crop up continually through the second half of the book, and actually are given more attention precisely because they are not ghettoized into a separate chapter.

Chapters 10–12 are substantially new, although they contain some material that appeared in the first and second editions. Chapter 10 examines the

new international politics of identity, the revival of religion as a factor in IR, and the post-1989 revival of nationalism. Chapter 11 focuses on the rise of the individual as an international actor, the politics of human rights, recent developments in international criminal law, and the notion of humanitarian intervention. Chapter 12 addresses the issue of American hegemony. As will be apparent, these three chapters are all, in very different ways, about both globalization and 9/11.

We would like to thank Michael Ainley, Michael Cox, Kimberly Hutchings and Nathalie Włodarczyk for their comments on particular chapters, our publisher, Steven Kennedy and an anonymous reviewer for Palgrave Macmillan for his/her enthusiasm for the text.

*London, 2004*

CHRIS BROWN  
KIRSTEN AINLEY

# Preface to the Second Edition

For this second edition of *Understanding International Relations* I have preserved the basic order of presentation and structure of the book – although I have eliminated the rather unnecessary division into ‘Parts’. All chapters have been revised and updated, and some more substantial changes have been made. The two chapters on general theory (2 and 3) have been reorganized and, in the case of 3, substantially rewritten; Chapter 2 is now a short history of international relations theory in the twentieth century, while Chapter 3 provides an overview of contemporary theory, giving due weight to ‘constructivism’ and other post-positivist movements. Chapter 9 has been substantially recast to acknowledge the importance of Gramscian international political economy.

The biggest changes come in the final two chapters, for two reasons. The first edition of this book was written in the mid-1990s, and was still influenced by a ‘post-Cold War’ mindset. This must now be abandoned; teachers of IR may still do a double-take when they see ‘St Petersburg’ on the Departures Board at Heathrow, but for our students the Cold War really is history. We need to stop thinking about the future of world politics in terms drawn from the ideological and strategic conflicts of the second half of the twentieth century. The second major change concerns the ‘G’ word – globalization. The first edition of *Understanding International Relations* treated the notion in passing and with scant respect; this was a mistake. It is important not to accept the more extreme claims made on behalf of globalization, but it requires a particular insensitivity to the way of the world to deny that there are changes going on in the world economy and in global society of such magnitude that we are required to rethink most of the categories with which we have been wont to interpret international relations. The final two chapters now reflect these two re-orientations – perhaps insufficiently, but a fuller account of the impact of globalization will have to wait for the third edition, if such there be.

I am grateful to all those who have suggested ways in which the first edition could be improved, and to the many scholars who pointed out errors therein – there were so many of the latter that I am inclined to think that any errors that remain are their fault. Steven Kennedy has been, as always, an exemplary and enthusiastic publisher. Tim Dunne has commented helpfully on early drafts of several chapters. Since writing the first edition, I have moved from the University of Southampton to the London School of Economics. Once again I have had the pleasure of teaching an introductory



International Relations course, this time to what must be one of the keenest and best-prepared group of students in the country; my thanks to them, and I add IR100 (LSE) to the list of courses acknowledged in the Preface to the first edition.

*London, 2000*

CHRIS BROWN

# Preface to the First Edition

This is a textbook, an introduction to the discipline of International Relations. The aim is to present within a relatively small compass an overview of the current state of International Relations theory. This book could be used as a text for undergraduate-level introductory courses, but it could also serve as a general introduction to theory for the increasing number of postgraduate students of the subject. It is sometimes assumed that postgraduates need a different literature from undergraduates; this seems to me not to be the case – good students at all levels need to have their minds engaged and stimulated, and this book is written on the assumption that all of its readers will have enquiring minds and be willing to put in the effort required to understand ideas that are sometimes quite complex.

There is sometimes an assumption that ‘theory’ is something that is suitable only for ‘advanced’ students, and that an introductory text ought not to be theoretically oriented. The fear is that students are not interested in theory, that they study International Relations with a practical orientation and become alienated if asked to think conceptually and abstractly, and, most damagingly, that students want to be told the ‘right’ answers and not to be exposed to the scandalous fact that authorities differ even on quite basic issues. These positions must be resisted. All understandings of International Relations and of the other social sciences are necessarily theoretical, the only issue is whether this is made explicit or not and most good students are well aware that this is so. The real danger is that by presenting International Relations Lite as a kind of a-theoretical discourse, ‘current-affairs-with-a-twist’, an adjunct to ‘higher journalism’, we alienate the brighter theorists amongst our students, and attract only those with a more empirical cast of mind. This is particularly galling because International Relations today is a theoretically sophisticated and challenging social science, the location of important debates on, for example, agency-structure, gender, identity, and the further reaches of postmodern and post-structural thought. Fortunately, this is reflected in the large number of theoretically sophisticated, high quality research students in the subject – what is interesting, and depressing, is how many of these students have discovered the importance of International Relations theory for themselves, and how few have come to the subject via an undergraduate education in IR.

When theory is taught, it is often as an adjunct to practice; its ‘relevance’ is repeatedly stressed on the apparent principle that inviting students to think abstractly is to place so onerous a burden on them that they must be promised an immediate and tangible reward in exchange for their efforts.

On the contrary, I think the theory of International Relations is a fascinating subject worthy of study in its own right – fortunately it happens also to have considerable practical relevance, but anyone who pursues the subject solely on that basis is going to miss a lot of the story, and, incidentally, much of the fun.

The following chapters fall into four sections, of unequal size. In the first part, Chapters 1 to 3, after an introductory chapter on the nature of theory, the evolution of International Relations theory is presented; post-1914–18 liberal internationalism, the contest between liberalism and realism in the 1930s, the post-1945 realist synthesis, the debate on method in the 1960s, pluralism and structuralism, and the current orthodoxies of neorealism and neoliberalism along with their critics. This history is necessary if we are to understand current thinking on International Relations; it provides the student with a basic vocabulary and grammar of the discipline, without which reading the current literature will be impossible. For most of the history of the discipline, the state has been the central focus for concern, and realism the most important theory, and Chapters 4 to 6 examine the characteristic topics of realist, ‘state-centric’ international relations: theories of the state, foreign policy decision-making, agency-structure problems, power, security, war and the balance of power. In the third part, Chapters 7 to 10, less state-centric accounts of the world are investigated: the notion of ‘global governance’, the workings of the world economy and its characteristic institutions, and North–South relations. Finally, in Chapters 11 and 12, the impact of the ending of the Cold War on International Relations theory is examined.

Although this may seem to offer a kind of progression of ideas, I have tried to avoid presenting this material in such a way as to suggest that the newer ideas are better because they are newer, or, for that matter, to suggest that any body of theory is self-evidently true or false. I have views on most of the subjects covered in this book, and usually it will not be too difficult to work out what they are, but I assume that the role of the textbook author is not primarily to condemn or praise. My aim is to present as fairly as possible the arguments in question. Thus, for example, I would not seek to hide the fact that I am out of sympathy with neorealist theorizing in International Relations, and the conclusion I draw in a number of chapters would, indeed, make this impossible to hide, but I would be disappointed if neorealists were to feel that my presentation of their work was loaded against them. Neorealism is an intellectually rigorous and challenging set of ideas – as are the notions of ‘rational choice’ upon which nowadays it is based. It deserves to be treated very seriously indeed and I hope I have done so in what follows.

At various points in the text I have made reference to ‘post-positivist’ International Relations, in particular to work on postmodernism, gender, and

critical theory. However, this is a book about theory, not about methodology or the philosophy of science, and, for the most part, the coverage of post-positivism will be limited to areas where post-positivists have actually contributed theory, as opposed to presenting promissory notes on what post-positivist theory might look like when it actually arrives. This means coverage of these topics is rather more patchy, and less enthusiastic than their adherents would approve of. However, compromises have to be made, and my own area of international political theory is also represented only at a few points. My aim is to give a critical account of the current 'state-of-the-art' of the discipline rather than to anticipate its shape in the next millennium – although, naturally, a few markers for the future will be laid down, especially in the final chapter. To deploy in defence of this project an analogy close to my heart, some of the masterpieces of twentieth-century music are certainly atonal, or serial, but it is impossible to develop any real appreciation of, say, Schoenberg's Op. 31 *Orchestral Variations*, or Berg's *Lulu*, without grasping the principles of *tonality* these great works defy. This book is about the International Relations equivalent of these latter principles, with some pointers as to how they might be overcome. In any event, there are many modern composers who persist with tonality to good effect ... but I digress.

References have been kept to a minimum to improve the readability of the text; however, a short guide to further reading is attached to each chapter. I have tried to provide a mixture of readings – old and new, books and articles; given the constraints on library budgets, a reference to an old, but still useful work may be more helpful than one to an up-to-date but unobtainable text. I have tried to provide both. A full bibliography is provided at the end of the book.

All textbooks are, one way or another, multi-authored. I have been studying International Relations for 31 years, and teaching the subject for 26; this has involved exchanging ideas with so many teachers, colleagues and students that I find it difficult to say where my own thinking begins and theirs ends. Listing all the people who have influenced my views on International Relations theory over the years would be impossible; if I single out the rather diverse group of Michael Banks, James Mayall, John Groom, Susan Strange and Steve Smith for special mention, it is in no spirit of disrespect to many others. I have had very helpful comments on this text from a number of anonymous readers for the publishers. Graham Smith has helped me to avoid making silly mistakes about the environment, but still disagrees with my position on that subject. Susan Stephenson assisted in the preparation of the index. Most of all, I have had the advantage of extensive commentaries from two of the best of the younger generation of International Relations theorists in Britain today; Molly Cochran of Bristol University read Parts I and II, and was particularly helpful in clarifying a number of presentational

points; and Tim Dunne of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, read the whole text, improved the argument throughout, and, in particular, forced me to rewrite Chapter 12. With the usual disclaimer that remaining errors of fact and interpretation are all mine, thanks to the above, to colleagues at the Universities of Kent and Southampton, to Steven Kennedy, and to the around 1,500 students on S314 (Kent) and PO 105 (Southampton) who, over the years, have attended my lectures (or not) and, variously, nodded in agreement, stared out of the window, looked confused, or laughed – sometimes even in appropriate places – all the while keeping me entertained and in gainful employment.

*Southampton, 1997*

CHRIS BROWN

# List of Abbreviations

BIAs	bilateral immunity agreements
BWS	Bretton Woods System
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CFCs	chlorofluorocarbons
ECLA	Economic Commission for Latin America
EDU	European Defence Union
FPA	foreign policy analysis
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GSP	Generalized System of Preferences
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IGOs	intergovernmental organizations
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPC	Integrated Programme for Commodities
IPE	International Political Economy
IR	International Relations
IRBM	Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles
ISI	Import Substitution Industrialization
IT	information technology
ITO	International Trade Organization
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
LIEO	liberal international economic order
MFA	Multi-Fibre Arrangement
MNC	multinational corporation
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
NICs	Newly Industrializing Countries
NIEO	New International Economic Order
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
R & D	research and development
RAM	Rational Actor Model
SRF	Soviet Rocket Forces
UN	United Nations

UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
VERs	voluntary export restraints
WMD	weapons of mass destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

# Contents

<i>Preface to the Third Edition</i>	viii
<i>Preface to the Second Edition</i>	x
<i>Preface to the First Edition</i>	xii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xvi
<b>1 Introduction: Defining International Relations</b>	<b>1</b>
Perspectives and theories	7
Conclusion	15
<b>2 The Development of International Relations</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Theory in the Twentieth Century</b>	<b>19</b>
Introduction	19
Liberal internationalism and the origins of the discipline	20
The ‘realist’ critique of liberal internationalism	24
The post-war synthesis	28
International Relations and the behavioural sciences	31
Challenges to the realist synthesis	33
Pluralism and complex interdependence	35
<b>3 International Relations Theory Today</b>	<b>40</b>
Introduction: rational choice theory and its critics	40
From realism to neorealism	41
From neorealism to neoliberalism	45
Constructivism and the ‘English School’	48
Critical, poststructuralist and ‘postmodern’ international thought	52
Conclusion	58
<b>4 The State and Foreign Policy</b>	<b>63</b>
Introduction	63
The state and International Relations	63
Foreign and domestic policy: the ‘decision’ as focus	69
Conclusion: from foreign policy to power	77
<b>5 Power and Security</b>	<b>80</b>
Introduction: statecraft, influence and power	80
Dimensions of power	81



Power, fear and insecurity	91
Conclusion: managing insecurity	94
<b>6 The Balance of Power and War</b>	<b>97</b>
Introduction	97
The balance of power	98
The political conception of war	103
War in the twentieth century	106
Conclusion: the end of state-centric International Relations?	111
<b>7 Global Governance</b>	<b>116</b>
Introduction: sovereignty, anarchy and global governance	116
Functionalism	118
Integration theory, federalism and neofunctionalism	122
Global economic institutions: Bretton Woods and after	125
International regimes and regime theory	129
Global governance and (collective) security	133
<b>8 The Global Economy</b>	<b>141</b>
Introduction	141
The growth of the world economy	142
Problems and perspectives	145
Structuralism	151
The new global economy	156
The end of the South?	159
<b>9 Globalization</b>	<b>164</b>
Introduction	164
A new economy?	165
Neoliberalism and its critics	167
New global problems – ‘Westfailure’?	172
Global civil society?	178
<b>10 The International Politics of Identity</b>	<b>185</b>
Introduction	185
Politics in industrial societies	186
Identity politics post-1989	190
Globalization and postindustrial society	193
Democracy promotion, Asian values and the ‘clash of civilizations’	197
Pluralism and international society	201
Conclusion	203