

Research
Based
Curricula



**What is the Biggest
Danger That We Face?
International Relations**

Key Stage 4
Citizenship Studies
Resource 2

2019



Resource Two

Overview



| | |
|--------------|--|
| Topic | International Relations Theories |
| GCSE Modules | Supra-curricular topics. |
| Objectives | <p>After completing this resource, you should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Be able to define 'Realism' as an international relations theory✓ Be able to identify main ideas within Realism✓ Be able to define 'Liberalism' as an international relations theory✓ Be able to identify main ideas within Liberalism✓ Be able to summarise the main differences between Realism and Liberalism✓ Have a position of why you agree or disagree with Realism or Liberalism or both |
| Instructions | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Read the data source2. Complete the activities3. Explore the further reading |
| Context | <p>This Resource covers International Relations Theories. A theory is a set of ideas or approaches which can be used to explain certain behaviours. There are different theories in the subject of International Relations. Each theory provides different explanations about the behaviour of states, how international relations and the international system works, and relations between states.</p> <p>This Resource will discuss the main ideas of two important and central theories in International Relations- Realism and Liberalism .</p> |

Resource Two

Data Source



Section A

An introduction to Realism

Sandrina Antunes and Isabel Camisã, 'Introducing Realism in International Relations Theory', February 27 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/27/introducing-realism-in-international-relations-theory/>



Important **theorists** of Realism include Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Hans Morgenthau, and Kenneth Waltz.

'In the **discipline** of International Relations (IR), Realism is a school of thought or theory that emphasises the competitive and conflictual side of international relations.

The first assumption of Realism is that the nation-state (usually abbreviated to 'state') is the principle actor in international relations. Other bodies exist, such as individuals and organisations, but their power is limited. Second, the state is a unitary actor. National interests, especially in times of war, lead the state to speak and act with one voice. Third, decision-makers are rational actors in the sense that rational decision-making leads to the pursuit of the national interest. The national interest is the most important concern. Here, taking actions that would make your state weak or vulnerable would not be rational. Realism suggests that all leaders, no matter what their political position, recognise this as they attempt to manage their state's affairs in order to survive in a competitive environment.

Finally, states live in a context of **anarchy** – that is, in the absence of anyone being in charge internationally. The often-used comparison of there being 'no one to call' in an international emergency helps to demonstrate this point. Within our own states, we typically have police forces, militaries, courts and so on. In an emergency, there is an expectation that these institutions will 'do something' in response. Internationally, there is no clear expectation of anyone or anything 'doing something' as there is no established hierarchy or order. Therefore, states can **ultimately** only rely on themselves.

Resource Two

Data Source



As Realism frequently draws on examples from the past, there is a great deal of emphasis on the idea that humans are essentially held hostage to repetitive patterns of behaviour which are determined by their nature. Central to that assumption is the view that human beings are **egoistic** and desire power. Realists believe that our selfishness, our appetite for power and our inability to trust others leads to predictable outcomes. Perhaps this is why war has been so common throughout recorded history. Since individuals are organised into states, human nature impacts on state behaviour.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Hans Morgenthau (1948) sought to develop a **comprehensive** international theory as he believed that politics, like society in general, is governed by laws that have roots in human nature...In contrast to more optimistically minded idealists who expected international tensions to be resolved through open negotiations marked by goodwill, Morgenthau set out an approach that emphasised power over morality. Indeed, morality was portrayed as something that should be avoided in policymaking. In Morgenthau's account, every political action is directed towards keeping, increasing, and demonstrating power. The thinking is that policies based on morality or idealism can lead to weakness – and possibly the destruction or domination of a state by a competitor (or rival).

In *Theory of International Politics* (1979), Kenneth Waltz focused more on Realism and the structure in the international relations system. States are **constrained** by existing in an international anarchic system (this is the structure). Second, any course of action they pursue is based on their relative power when measured against other states. This explains the behaviour of states.

Resource Two

Data Source



Criticisms of Realism

Realists believe that their theory of approach to the behaviour of states and the international system accurately explains how states and the international system or international relations operate. However, there are a number of different criticisms or objections which Realists face. Critics argue that Realists can help **perpetuate** the violent and confrontational world that they describe. By assuming the un-cooperative and **egoistic** nature of humankind and the absence of hierarchy in the state system, Realists encourage leaders to act in ways based on suspicion, power and force.

Realism is often criticised as **excessively pessimistic**, since it sees the confrontational nature of the international system as **inevitable**. However, according to Realists, leaders are faced with endless **constraints** and few opportunities for cooperation. Therefore, they can do little to escape the reality of power politics. For a Realist, facing the reality of one's **predicament** is not **pessimism** – it is **prudence**. The Realist account of international relations stresses that the possibility of peaceful change, or in fact any type of change, is limited. For a leader to rely on such an **idealistic** outcome would be **folly**. States have to be wise and realistic

Realists are also accused of focusing too much on the state as a solid unit, ultimately overlooking other actors and forces within the state and also ignoring international issues not directly connected to the survival of the state.

Many critics of Realism focus on one of its central strategies in the management of world affairs – an idea called 'the balance of power'. This describes a situation in which states are continuously making choices to increase their own capabilities while undermining the capabilities of others. This generates a 'balance' of sorts as (theoretically) no state is

Resource Two

Data Source



permitted to get too powerful within the international system. If a state attempts to push its luck and grow too much, like Nazi Germany in the 1930s, it will trigger a war because other states will form an alliance to try to defeat it – that is, restore a balance. This balance of power system is one of the reasons why international relations is **anarchic**. No single state has been able to become a global power and unite the world under its direct rule. Hence, realism talks frequently about the importance of flexible alliances as a way of ensuring survival. These alliances are determined less by political or cultural similarities among states and more by the need to find states to form flexible alliances with against others. They can be thought of as 'enemies of my enemy.'

While Realists describe the balance of power as a **prudent** strategy to manage an insecure world, critics see it as a way of legitimising war and aggression.

Despite these criticisms, Realism remains central within the field of IR theory, with most other theories concerned (at least in part) with critiquing it.'

Section B

Realism and human nature

Sandrina Antunes and Isabel Camisã, 'Introducing Realism in International Relations Theory'

<https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/27/introducing-realism-in-international-relations-theory/>

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) was an Italian diplomat, politician, philosopher, historian, writer and poet. Machiavelli focused on how basic human characteristics influence the security of the state. In his time, leaders were usually male, which also influences the Realist account of politics. In *The Prince* (1532), Machiavelli stressed that a leader's primary (main) concern is to promote national security. In order to successfully perform this task, the leader needs to be alert and cope effectively with internal as well as external threats to his rule; he needs to be a lion and a fox. Power (the Lion) and deception (the Fox) are crucial tools for the conduct of foreign policy. In Machiavelli's view, rulers obey the 'ethics of

Resource Two

Data Source



responsibility' rather than the conventional religious morality that guides the average citizen – that is, they should be good when they can, but they must also be willing to use violence when necessary to guarantee the survival of the state.

Section C

Thomas Hobbes
'Leviathan'

Image accessed
<https://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2018/april/04/how-hobbes-first-pictured-the-monster-of-good-government/>



Section D

Image of historic conflict
between states and
rulers

Image accessed
<https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages/hundred-years-war>



Resource Two

Data Source



Section E

An introduction to Liberalism

Jeffrey W. Meiser, 'Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory', February 18 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/18/introducing-liberalism-in-international-relations-theory/>

Liberalism is a defining feature of modern democracy (this is the political system which governs the United Kingdom, for example, today). Liberalism contains a variety of **concepts** and arguments about how institutions, behaviours and economic connections **contain** and lessen the violent power of states.

Liberalism is based on the moral argument that ensuring the right of an individual person to life, **liberty** and property is the highest goal of government. Consequently, Liberals emphasise the wellbeing of the individual as the **fundamental** building block of a just political system. A political system characterised by **unchecked** power, such as a monarchy or a dictatorship, cannot protect the life and liberty of its citizens. Therefore, the main concern of Liberalism is to construct institutions that protect individual freedom by limiting and checking political power. While these are issues of domestic politics, the realm of IR is also important to Liberals because a state's activities abroad can have a strong influence on **liberty** at home.

Liberals are particularly troubled by militaristic foreign policies. The primary concern is that war requires states to build up military power. This power can be used for fighting foreign states, but it can also be used to **oppress** its own citizens. For this reason, political systems rooted in Liberalism often limit military power by such means as ensuring civilian control over the military. Wars of territorial expansion, or imperialism – when states seek to build empires by taking territory overseas – are especially disturbing for liberals. Not only do expansionist wars strengthen the state at the expense of the people, these wars also require long-term commitments to the military occupation and political control of foreign territory and peoples. Occupation and control require large bureaucracies that have an interest in maintaining or expanding the occupation of foreign territory.

Resource Two

Data Source



For Liberals, therefore, the core problem is how to develop a political system that can allow states to protect themselves from foreign threats without threatening the rights and freedoms of its own citizens. The primary institutional check on power in liberal states is free and fair elections where the people can vote for their ruler and remove their rulers from power. This provides a **fundamental** check on the behaviour of the government. A second important limitation on political power is the division of political power among different branches and levels of government – such as a parliament/congress, an executive and a legal system. This allows for checks and balances in the use of power.

Democratic Peace Theory is perhaps the strongest contribution which Liberalism makes to IR theory. It asserts that democratic states are highly unlikely to go to war with one another. This is for two main reasons. First, democratic states are characterised by internal restraints on power, as described above. Second, democracies tend to see each other as legitimate and unthreatening and therefore have a higher capacity for cooperation with each other than they do with non-democracies. Statistical analysis and historical case-studies provide strong support for Democratic Peace Theory.

We currently live in an international system structured by the Liberal world order built after the Second World War (1939–1945). The international institutions, organisations and norms (expected behaviours) of this world order are built on the same foundations as **domestic** Liberal institutions and norms, the desire to restrain the violent power of states. In the international system, power is weakened and **dispersed** internationally than it is within states. For example, under International Law, wars of aggression are **prohibited**. There is no international police force to enforce this law, but an aggressor knows that when breaking this law it risks

Resource Two

Data Source



considerable international backlash. For example, states – either individually or as part of a collective body like the United Nations – can impose economic **sanctions** or intervene militarily against the offending state. Furthermore, an aggressive state also risks missing out on the benefits of peace, such as the gains from international trade, foreign aid and diplomatic recognition.

Liberal theory also emphasises other important aspects of a Liberal system.

First, International Law and agreements in international organisations are very important for peace and cooperation between states. A top example of such an organisation is the United Nations, which has resources for common goals (such as addressing climate change), provides for near constant **diplomacy** between enemies and friends alike and gives all member states a voice in the international community.

Second, the spread of free trade and capitalism through the efforts of powerful liberal states and international organisations like the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank creates an open, market-based, international economic system. This situation is **mutually beneficial** as a high level of trade between states decreases conflict and makes war less likely, since war would disrupt or cancel the benefits (profits) of trade. States with large trade ties therefore have an **incentive** to maintain peaceful relations. By this calculation, war is not profitable, but **detrimental** to the state.

The third element of the Liberal international order is international norms. Liberal norms favour international cooperation, human rights, democracy and rule of law. When a state takes actions contrary to (different to or against) these norms, they are subject to various types of costs. However, international norms are often **contested** because of the wide **variation** in values around the globe. In conclusion, for Liberals, states can benefit significantly

Resource Two

Data Source



from cooperation if they trust one another to live up to their agreements. Liberals see a world where states will likely cooperate in any agreement where any increase in prosperity is probable (likely).

A core argument of liberalism is that concentrations of violent power are the fundamental threat to individual liberty and must be **restrained**. The primary means of restraining power are institutions and norms at both domestic and international level. At the international level institutions and organisations limit the power of states by developing cooperation and providing a means for imposing costs on states that **violate** international agreements.

Economic institutions are particularly effective at developing cooperation because of the **substantial** benefits that can be gained from economic **interdependence**. Finally, Liberal norms add a further limitation on the use of power by shaping our understanding of what types of behaviour are appropriate. Today, Liberalism is a strong force in international relations and has a much more positive perspective on international relations and the behaviour of states compared with Realism.

Criticisms

Democratic Peace Theory has a number of issues which continue to be debated. First, democracy is a relatively recent development in human history. This means there are few cases of democracies having the opportunity to fight one another. Second, we cannot be sure whether it is truly a 'democratic' peace or whether some other factors mixed with democracy are the source of peace – such as power, alliances, culture, economics and so on. A third point is that while democracies are unlikely to go to war with one another, some scholarship suggests that they are likely to be aggressive toward non-democratic states – such as when the United States of America (a democratic state) went to war with Iraq (a non-democratic state then) in 2003.

Resource Two

Data Source



from cooperation if they trust one another to live up to their agreements. Liberals see a world where states will likely cooperate in any agreement where any increase in prosperity is probable (likely).

A core argument of liberalism is that concentrations of violent power are the fundamental threat to individual liberty and must be **restrained**. The primary means of restraining power are institutions and norms at both domestic and international level. At the international level institutions and organisations limit the power of states by developing cooperation and providing a means for imposing costs on states that **violate** international

Section F

The United Nations

Photo accessed
<https://www.france24.com/en/20180224-united-nations-security-council-eastern-ghouta-ceasefire-syria>



Section G

Global Trade

Photo accessed
<http://energyinfrapost.com/global-trade-tensions-surge-oil-prices-weigh-indian-market/>



Resource Two

Activities



- Activities**
- 1) For Realism, who is the main actor in international relations?
 - 2) According to Realist theory, what are decision-makers or state leaders mostly concerned with?
 - 3) Select which 5 words are appropriate to Realist theory of international relations:

*Friendly Anarchy Rules conflictual calmness
competitive survival unitary cooperation peaceful*

From these options, select 2 words and summarise what Realist theory says about them to describe how international relations and the behaviour of states work. Describe the words separately. As an extension exercise, summarise the 5 correct words. Aim to write 2 sentences to summarise each word.

- 4) Inside states, discuss what prevents anarchy from existing.
- 5) From Sources A and B, examine Realist perspectives on human nature. To what extent do you agree with these perspectives? Aim to write at least 2 paragraphs for your answer.
- 6) Consider Sources C and D. In what ways do they reflect perspectives of Realism discussed in Sources A and B? aim to write at least 1 paragraph for your answer.
- 7) Using one of the criticisms of Realism listed in the text, persuade a Realist to consider their views. Aim to write at least 2 paragraphs for your answer.
- 8) Fill in the blanks to complete this sentence:

'Liberalism is based on the *M* argument that ensuring the *R* of an individual person to *L*, *L* and *P* is the *H* *G* of government.'



Resource Two

Activities



- Activities**
- 9) A political system characterised by what cannot protect the life and liberty of its citizens?
 - 10) Evaluate why Liberals are troubled by military power or wars. For your answer, aim to write at least 3 sentences
 - 11) In what ways do Sources F and G reflect Liberal perspectives about international relations? For your answer, aim to write at least 4 sentences.
 - 12) Devise your own image or caption which reflects a key idea in Liberalism
 - 13) Select one reason which Liberalist theory gives about why conflict and aggression between states can be limited if there is a Liberal system. Defend whether or not you agree with this reason. Try to write 2 paragraphs or more.
 - 14) Which perspective on International Relations- Realism or Liberalism- do you think best describes international relations? Justify your answer. Try to write 2 paragraphs or more. If you want to challenge yourself, do some independent research and extend your answer to a short essay of 5-6 paragraphs.

Resource Two

Further Reading



Explore 1. ['The Great Debate: Realism vs Liberalism'](#)



2. [Liberalism or Realism?](#)



www.researchbasedcurricula.com



www.access-ed.ngo



[@_AccessEd](https://twitter.com/_AccessEd)



hello@access-ed.ngo



100 Black Prince Road
London, SE1 7SJ



AccessEd is a non-profit company
registered in England (#10383890)