Chapter 2

Realism in International Relations: A Survey

Introduction
This chapter is an attempt to review the various strands of realist thinking in International Relations (IR). The first section provides a brief overview of the realist tradition from the ancient period to the newest formulations. The following sections briefly review the three key strands of realism: Classical Realism, Neorealism (structural realism), and Neoclassical Realism. The chapter then looks at how realism addresses the two important concepts of power and security followed by which it focuses on the realist understanding of the balancing behaviour of states.

Overview
Realism provides the most widely accepted and least complicated answer to the working of the international system and the politics therein. Realist theoretical tradition has been extensively debated, fine-tuned, and even, in a sense, radically recast. The roots of political realism, as it was referred to before the advent of the 'scientific approach' to the theoretical tradition, are often traced back to Greek historian Thucydides (460 BC – 395 BC) and his book *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, written in 431 BC. Thucydides writes that it is a universal principle that all states pursue their own interests and address justice and morality only when it suites their interests. Power politics, according to him, is a law of human behaviour and it is this human behavior that guides politics among states.

The realist tradition became more prominent through the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) and Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) in the mid-seventeenth century. In fact, the foundation of modern realism was laid by Machiavelli. He examined issues regarding foreign policy, the nature of international relations and the role of military force (Shultz

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3 *The Prince* by Machiavelli and *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes
Machiavelli’s *The Prince* praises the ancient Roman leaders for their policy of universal domination. Machiavelli thinks that it was the nature of the existing international system that forced the Romans to strive for universal domination—conquest was perceived to be necessary to fend off threats to their own security and preemptive strikes are adopted by prudent states. Even those states that do not pose a threat should be brought under control as those states can be won over by one’s enemies, Machiavelli argued.

Hobbes’ philosophy of human nature informs his theory of state behaviour, wherein he laid the foundation of one of Classical Realism’s most important tenets. A prominent Social Contractarian Hobbes talks about the existence of a state of nature before the society was founded. The state of nature was a state of insecurity and war. Even though the individuals agreed to end this state of nature among themselves by forming societies, the societies thus formed continue to remain in a state of war. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), a later social contractarian, is a milder version of Hobbesian realism. He talks about the existence of a ‘general will’ which exists in the society but it does not apply to the international society. The key difference between Hobbes and Rousseau is that while the former talks about biological determinism of conflict the latter holds the power dynamics in the international system responsible for conflict, much like the neorealists.

However, Hobbesian realism underwent a great deal of moderation in the thought of Montesquieu (1689–1755) (*The Spirit of the Laws*) and John Locke (1632–1704) (*Questions Concerning the Law of Nature and Second Treatise of Government*), who were the proponents of liberal realism. The enlightenment period also saw the idealism of Kantian philosophy which emphasized morality, universalism, law and international organizations (Shultz 1993: 47). Later in the 20th century, the famous 14 points proposed by Woodrow Wilson further watered down the realist logic of international politics.

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4 In India, it is Kautilya’s *Arthasastra* that is considered to be the earliest work on foreign policy with its realist tenets.
Power politics, balance of power, the human urge for power, and such related concepts were eventually clubbed together under the umbrella term 'realism'. As Barry Buzan points out, the “focus on power politics provides the apparent continuity of the realist tradition” (Buzan 1996: 51). This loosely used concept of realism was properly shaped and defined by post-World War I Western scholars of International Relations. The realist tradition was further theoretically nuanced by E. H. Carr in his book *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* wherein he argued for making a distinction between idealist views and realist views of international politics. He wrote the book with the aim “of counteracting the glaring and dangerous defect of nearly all thinking, both academic and popular, about international politics in English-speaking countries from 1919 to 1939 – the almost total neglect of the factor of power” (Carr 1964: vii).

The historically and conceptually scattered realist dogmas were further systematized and given the shape of a proper theory by Hans J. Morgenthau’s defining book *Politics Among Nations*, published in 1948. The famous scholar-practitioners of realism during the Cold War namely, Henry Kissinger and George Kennan, not only called themselves realists but also promoted the cause of the theory in *realpolitik*. The theory became more 'scientific' with the publication of Kenneth Waltz’s seminal 1979 work, the *Theory of International Politics*, in which he propounded a structural or systemic approach to international politics as opposed to one based on human nature.

The field of international relations is today flooded with many variants of realism. To quote Glenn Snyder: “The field of international relations now has at least two varieties of “structural realism,” probably three kinds of “offensive realism,” and several types of “defensive realism,” in addition to “neoclassical,” “contingent,” “specific,” and “generalist” realism (2002: 149-150)” Snyder includes the writings of John J. Mearsheimer, Eric J. Labs, Robert Gilpin and Fareed Zakaria among the offensive realists. The others in this group, who are overlooked by Snyder, could include William Wohlfforth and Randall Schweller. Snyder himself, Kenneth Waltz, Robert Jervis, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, Barry R. Posen, Stephen Van Evera, Stephen M. Walt are considered to
be defensive realists by him. Dale Copeland, Charles Glaser and Benjamin Miller could also be included in that group. While Charles L. Glaser is a “contingent realist” by his own admission, Richard Rosecrance proposes “specific” and “generalist” strands of realism (Snyder 2002: 149–173).

Indeed, both neorealism and neoclassical realism have their defensive and offensive variants. Within neorealism the defensive variants suggest that there are incentives in the international system for expansion but it is not a permanent feature because such incentives exist only under certain conditions. The major proponents of the defensive position are: Kenneth Waltz (balance-of-power theory), Stephan Walt (balance-of-threat theory), Dale Copeland (dynamic differentials theory), the great power cooperation theories of Robert Jervis, Charles Glaser and Benjamin Miller. The defensive variants in neoclassical realism are the following: Thomas Christensen (domestic mobilization theory) and the offense-defense theories of Stephan Van Evera, Jack Snyder, Charles Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann (Taliaferro 2000-2001: 135).

Similarly, both neorealism and neoclassical realism have their offensive variants as well. Within neorealism, the offensive variants suggest that there are always incentives in the international system for expansion. The offensive variants are Gilpin (hegemonic stability theory), A.F.K Organski and Jacek Kugler (power transition theory), and John Mearsheimer (theory of great power politics). The offensive variants within neoclassical realism include: Fareed Zakaria (state-centered realism), Eric Labs, (theory of war aims), Randall Schweller (balance of interests theory) and William Wohlforth (hegemonic theory of foreign policy) (Taliaferro 2000-2001: 135).

Before exploring the major themes running through realist thought, it is perhaps apt to see what fuels the engine of realist theoretical thinking. Much of contemporary realist thought, with the exception of classical realism, holds that it is the feeling of being insecure that forces states behave the way they do. It is the existence of a security deficit, in other words, that leads to security competition among states, as security is perceived by them to be a scarce commodity that is not easy to find in the international system.
Security competition leads to a security dilemma. In 1952, John Hertz put the logic of security dilemma and the circumstances leading to it very succinctly:

For it stems from a fundamental social constellation, one where a plurality of otherwise interconnected groups constitute ultimate units of political life, that is, where groups live alongside each other without being organized into a higher unity. Wherever such anarchic society has existed—and it has existed in most periods of known history on some level—there has arisen what may be called the "security dilemma" of men, or groups, or their leaders. Groups or individuals living in such a constellation must be, and usually are, concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by other groups and individuals. Striving to attain security from such attack, they are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on (Hertz 1952: 157).

The centrality of the state as the principle actor is an important feature of the realist understanding. However, the state need not be taken in a literal sense here. The shape and form of the key actor varies according to historical circumstances. In the present global system it is the state that is the primary actor. However in other historical milieus the state could be replaced, preserving the same analytical validity, with other actors such as city-states, tribes, principalities, and regional political unions. These units are called "conflict groups", "each organized as a unitary political actor that rationally pursues distinctive goals" (Legro & Moravcsik 1999: 7).

A common misnomer about realism that deserves mention here is that international anarchy is equated with incessant conflict. Anarchy only means lack of an organizing and overseeing agent in the international system, which makes it possible to have conflicts in the international arena and that the states are aware of such a state of affairs leading them to prepare for survival. In other words, realism does not predict constant conflict, but only the constant possibility of conflict.
Key Realist Assumptions

Joseph Grieco (1997: 165-166) explains the key set of assumptions of realism in three inter-related clusters. One, states are rational actors, which he says incorporates three elements from a realist point of view. First of all, realists assume that states are goal oriented. Secondly, it is assumed that their goals are consistent. Thirdly, states are assumed to devise appropriate strategies to achieve their goals. The second part of the cluster relates to realist assumptions regarding the autonomous nature of states taken from their domestic societies (a point disputed by neoclassical realists) to realize and pursue the interests of the nation as a whole, and not just those of particular powerful groups within the domestic sphere. The last cluster of assumptions claims that states possess the capacity for unity of action.

John Mearsheimer in his book The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (2001: 337) brings out five assumptions that realists share: 1) the international system is anarchic; 2) states inherently possess some offensive military capability which gives them the wherewithal to hurt and possibly destroy each other; 3) states can never be certain about the intentions of other states; 4) the most basic motive among states is survival; 5) states think strategically about how to survive in the international system. Mearsheimer writes that states are rational actors and the miscalculations they make, from time to time, arise out of the fact that they operate in a world of imperfect information.

Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven Miller (1995: ix) claim that realism is not a single theory but a general approach to international politics. They bring out six ‘core beliefs’ of the general realist approach: 1) states are the most important actors in international politics; 2) anarchy is the distinguishing feature of international life; 3) states seek to maximize their security; 4) states are rational actors; 5) states will tend to rely on the threat or use of military force to secure their objectives; 6) most realists share the belief that aspects of the international system - especially the distribution of power among states - are the most important causes of the basic patterns of international politics and foreign policy.
Classical Realism

Classical realist tradition in western thought goes back thousands of years. Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Rousseau all belong to the classical realist tradition. Thucydides focuses on the concept of security dilemma. He argues in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* that the war between Sparta and Athens was a result of the fear that the growth Athenian power invoked in the minds of the Spartans. The Spartans thought it was important to maintain balance of power in the ‘international system’ in which they existed. On the other hand, we see seeds of offensive realist thinking in the Athenian argument that the strong dominate the weak in the international system. In refuting the Spartan condemnation of the Athenian aspiration for universal domination, the Athenians argued that the Spartan perspective was hypocritical since all states pursue their interests and care not for morality.

Machiavelli’s treatise *The Prince* is considered to be one of the earliest texts of realist writings. His praise for ancient Rome’s desire for universal imperialism, which he regards as a necessary ambition by prudent rulers, stems from his argument that a state aspires for universal imperialism to forestall threats to its security. Machiavelli, in other words, suggests that states aspire to conquer the world for the sake of self-defense (*The Prince*, chapter three). This is very much an offensive realist argument and is similar to what Mearshemier argued about the hegemonistic ambitions of states.

The classical contractarian school of the early modern age marks the beginning of the modern era of realist thinking. Important among the classical contractarians was Thomas Hobbes, whose arguments on the ‘state of nature’ have become well respected in the classical realist tradition. Hobbes’ work *Leviathan* argues that prior to the formation of the state, human beings remained in a state of nature which was characterised by insecurity and fear. While the formation of the state helped human beings escape their

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5 James Der Derian comments on Hobbes, “In the writings of Hobbes, we can discern the anthropological foundations of an epistemic realism, in the sense of an ethico-political imperative embedded in the nature of things...[I]n epistemic realism, the search for security through sovereignty is not a political choice but the necessary reaction to an anarchical condition: Order is man-made and good; chaos is natural and evil. In short, the security of epistemic realism is ontological, theological and teleological: that is, metaphysical”. (James Der Derian 1995: 29-30).
state of nature, since the state imposed rules to guide the behaviour of citizens, the system of states continued to remain in a state of nature where fear and insecurity prevailed because there was no sovereign power among states to enforce obedience and remove that fear and insecurity. Later on, another contractarian, Jean Jacques Rousseau, denied that human beings are as conflictual as Hobbes asserted, but rather that human beings are capable of peaceful coexistence with one another. He introduced an element of morality into world affairs by saying that states could indulge in ‘unjust’ wars as there is no morality in the conduct of international relations.

Classical realism was first presented coherently in Morgenthau’s *Politics among Nations*. The importance of this book and the prominence realism gained at that point of time need to be seen in the milieu and context in which it was written and the overall development of the discipline of International Relations (IR). The study of IR, during the inter-war years, was primarily motivated by the Wilsonian ideals of democracy, national self-determination, the need for a global body such as the League of Nations, and progressive internationalism, among others.

Bill McSweeney notes:

[D]uring the period from the establishment of IR as an academic discipline in 1919 until the middle of the 1950’s, security was understood more as a multidisciplinary and multidimensional problem, requiring the application of international law, international organization and political theory to the promotion of democracy, international institutions and disarmament. Wright, Hertz, Brode and Wolfers were some of the key scholars who explored the political, psychological and economic aspects of war and Peace and - particularly in Quincy Wright - their Philosophical and moral ramifications (1999: 31-32).

David Baldwin (1996: 117-141) supports this argument when he points out that during the inter-war years, most IR scholars believed that international peace and security could be brought about by promoting democracy, international understanding, diplomacy, national self-determination, disarmament and collective security. The major focus of the
scholars studying IR and security then was international law and organization rather than military force.

The idealist focus in IR suffered a major setback at the start of the Second World War. When the Second World War began, three things had been brought home to the students of IR. The failure of the League of Nations to avoid yet another world war; the failure of international law and organization to preempt the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany; and the lethal power of nuclear weapons. All three, as a consequence, meant an absolute loss of faith for academicians and practitioners alike in the idealism of yesteryears.

Gwyn Prins (1998: 781) writes about two shocks that “burned the conscience and sensibilities of scholars in the late 1940s”: the reality of the Third Reich and its horrible deeds and “the political inadequacy of inter-war structures in international conflict resolution”. It was around the same time that the second edition of E. H Carr’s Twenty Years Crisis was published. Prins argues that such writings which also included Martin Wight’s (1946) Chatham House Pamphlet, “Power Politics Looking Forward”, and Hans Morgenthau’s Politics Among Nations, which were “free of the taint of too much optimism about human nature”... “conditioned the intellectual environment of the immediate post-war years to be caustic about alleged idealism in the interests of security” (1998: 782). Prins goes on to argue that there were two more shocks: the dropping of atom bombs on Japan, and “the transformation of Stalin’s Soviet Union from popular wartime ally to implacable ideological enemy” (1998: 782).

These developments meant that IR now had to tread a different path altogether; it had to find a new research agenda and a different set of philosophies to be guided by, so that it did not repeat the terrible mistake committed during the inter-war years of leaving existential issues like international security to idealists. To quote Prins: [F]or security studies, this double shock prescribed a double-agenda. One track explored the relationship of the atomic bomb to international relations. The other opened a complex and ultimately very large study of the military/technical dimensions and security.” Thus we see the onset of the dominance of the realist school in IR in general and security
studies in particular: "Security came to focus on war, the ability to fight wars and the external threats to the state which might give rise to them" (Prins 1998: 783).

As mentioned earlier, the Third Reich, World War II and atom bombs gave birth to an intellectual environment wherein idealism was forced to give way to realism. The UN was perceived to be the organization of the victors. This transition from idealism to realpolitick also meant that strategic issues and power politics became important in the study of world politics. Eventually, "post-war realists like Carr, Morgenthau, Hertz, and Kennan became required material for those attempting to understand international relations and construct a more stable and secure international system. Realism quickly became synonymous with the study of security and as the politics of Cold War constrained the actions of states and the theoretical investigation of those actions, an inseparable link between realism and strategic studies was forged" (Lott 2004: 3-4).

It is in such a context of tumultuous changes in world politics that Morgenthau brought out his path breaking publication. His realist understanding believes that the world

...is the result of forces inherent in human nature. To improve the world one must work with those forces, not against them. This being inherently a world of opposing interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully realized, but must at best be approximated through the ever temporary balancing of interests and the ever pre-carious settlement of conflicts. This school, then, sees in a system of checks and balances a universal principle for all pluralist societies. It appeals to his-toric precedent rather than to abstract principles, and aims at the realization of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good (Morgenthau 1948: 3).

He laid out six principles of political realism. His laws argued that politics is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature; that interest is defined in terms of power; that what constitutes interest in a particular period of time depends on the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated; that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place; that political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the
moral laws that govern the universe; and that the political realist maintains the autonomy of the political sphere. (1948: 4-13)

Mearsheimer (2001: 18) calls classical realism ‘human nature realism’ and claims it has dominated the study of world politics since the late 1940s. This kind of realism, he argues, does, “recognize that international anarchy - the absence of a governing authority over the great powers - causes states to worry about the balance of power. But that structural constraint is treated as a second-order cause of state behavior. The principal driving force in international politics is the will to power inherent in every state in the system, and it pushes them to strive for supremacy.”

Classical realists also made a distinction between satisfied powers and dissatisfied powers, a distinction later on picked up by some neoclassical realists. While E. H. Carr talked about “status quo” and “revisionist states”, Morgenthau wrote about “imperialist” versus “status quo” policies. Status quo policies favour preservation of the distribution of power as it exists at a particular moment in history, and imperialist policies aim to overthrow that status quo (Morgenthau 1948: 54). However, neorealists do not talk about revisionist states at all. Schweller refers to this as the status-quo bias of Neorealism.6

The Rise of Neorealism in International Relations
Kenneth Waltz’s much celebrated book, the Theory of International Politics, published in 1979, offered a rigorous systemic theory of world politics. Other than depending on deterministic factors such as human nature or factors like regime type and domestic influences, neorealism (also called structural realism since it is a system level theory and not a unit level one) promises to explain state behaviour as resulting from the power differences among states and the resultant systemic dynamics. Neorealism seeks to understand and explain international outcomes: in other words, the resultant phenomena that arise out of the interaction of two or more actors in the international system. The outcomes it seeks to explain are: likelihood of major war, the prospects for international

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Akin to classical realism, state, anarchy and power are important properties of the international system for neorealism. Anarchy, and not hierarchy, is the ordering principle of the neorealist's international system; the concept of power is, however, qualified. Unlike in realism, where power is an end in itself, for neorealism power is a means to security and more importantly for survival in an anarchic system. The explanatory power of the theory arises from the fact that despite differences in regimes, policy makers, ideologies and domestic circumstances, foreign policies of all states are driven by the very same systemic factors, something the neorealists claim to throw highlight. In other words, the major argument of neorealism is that the broad outcomes of international politics can be best understood as resulting from structural constraints imposed on the states by their system, rather than from unit behavior (Schroeder 1994: 108).

As to what can be expected and what cannot be expected from structural realism, Waltz wrote the following:

[A] theory of international politics . . . can describe the range of likely outcomes of the actions and interactions of states within a given system and show how the range of expectations varies as systems change. It can tell us what pressures are exerted and what possibilities are posed by systems of different structure, but it cannot tell us just how, and how effectively, the units of a system will respond to those pressures and possibilities. . . . To the extent that dynamics of a system limit the freedom of its units, their behavior and the outcomes of their behavior become predictable . . . [but in general] a theory of international politics bears on the foreign policies of nations while claiming to explain only certain aspects of them (1979: 71-72).

The three important components of the international political structure according to Waltz are ordering principle (anarchy), the character of the units in the system, and the distribution of capabilities of the units in the system. The ordering principle of the international system, unlike the domestic system, is anarchic, without any overarching authority above the states. In the words of Scott Burchill, states “become ‘socialized” into
behaviour that centers on mutual distrust, self-reliance and the pursuit of security through the accumulation of the means to wage war against each other” (Burchill 2001: 91). Apart from symbolizing no supranational regulatory authority in the international system, anarchy also means no control or imposition of obligations on states. Robert Art and Robert Jervis (1992: 330) write: “States can make commitments and treaties, but no sovereign power ensures compliance and punishes deviations. This – the absence of a supreme power – is what is meant by anarchic environment of international politics”.

States in the system are also functionally similar – all of the, for example, seek security. However, despite their functional similarity, they differ in their capabilities. That is, states do not differ in function but in power. Waltz writes:

[S]tates are alike in the tasks they face, though not in their abilities to perform them. The differences are of capability, no function. States perform or try to perform tasks, most of which are common to all of them; the ends they aspire to are similar. Each state duplicates the activities of other states at least to a considerable extent (1979: 96).

Thirdly, Waltz talks about the distribution of capabilities: the degree of concentration or diffusion of capabilities within the system. Waltz argues that distribution of power in the international system is the variable that explains everything that matters in international politics: war and peace, alliance politics, and balance of power.

Waltzian realism claims to be parsimonious and blames classical realism for being reductionist (i.e. unit level) in its analysis. For Waltz, the difference between unit level and system level is that "[n]ational politics consists of differentiated units performing specified functions. International politics consists of like units duplicating one another’s activities” (1979: 97).

Neorealism has suffered much criticism following the end of the Cold War with many claiming that it is not useful for understanding the world anymore. Some remark that not only has the nature of the international system changed fundamentally but also there has been permeation of liberal democracy that has allowed a general peaceful coexistence
among states to become possible (as the democratic peace thesis argues).\textsuperscript{7} Waltz rebuts these criticisms in his 2000 article "Structural Realism After the Cold War".

Responding to assertions that the arrival of nuclear weapons has fundamentally changed the structure of the international system, he writes: "Nuclear weapons decisively change how some states provide for their own and possibly for others' security; but nuclear weapons have not altered the anarchic structure of the international political system" (Waltz 2000: 5).

His response the democratic peace thesis' argument, that liberal democracies will make war obsolete, is that there is simply no historical evidence to support this hypothesis. Citing the Cold War examples of US intervention in the Dominican Republic and Chile, Waltz says that since a liberal democracy at war with another country is unlikely to consider its enemy a liberal democracy (2000: 5), it is at best a rhetorical exercise rather than one in theory building. More importantly, he argues that the democratic peace thesis does not mean anything for the structure of the international system:

Democracies may live at peace with democracies, but even if all states became democratic, the structure of international politics would remain anarchic. The structure of international politics is not transformed by changes internal to states, however widespread the changes may be. In the absence of an external authority, a state cannot be sure that today's friend will not be tomorrow's enemy (2000: 10).

Waltz also refutes that war is unlikely to occur in an interdependent world. Firstly, he claims that "interdependence promotes war as well as peace" (2000: 14); Secondly, "among the forces that shape international politics, interdependence is a weak one" (2000: 14); thirdly, "States, if they can afford to, shy away from becoming excessively dependent on goods and resources that may be denied to them in crises and wars. States take measures, such as Japan's managed trade, to avoid excessive dependence on others" (2000: 15).

\textsuperscript{7} In the words of Waltz neorealism's critics claim that "international politics is being transformed and realism is being rendered obsolete as democracy extends its sway, as interdependence tightens its grip, and as institutions smooth the way to peace" (2000: 6).
Waltz also alleges that the existence of international institutions is a sign of the increasing irrelevance of realism. He writes:

What is true of NATO holds for international institutions generally. The effects that international institutions may have on national decisions are but one step removed from the capabilities and intentions of the major state or states that gave them birth and sustain them. The Bretton Woods system strongly affected individual states and the conduct of international affairs. But when the United States found that the system no longer served its interests, the Nixon shocks of 1971 were administered. International institutions are created by the more powerful states, and the institutions survive in their original form as long as they serve the major interests of their creators, or are thought to do so. "The nature of institutional arrangements," as Stephen Krasner put it, "is better explained by the distribution of national power capabilities than by efforts to solve problems of market failure"—or, I would add, by anything else (2000: 26).

Regarding the lack of balance of power in a unipolar international system where the US is the lone hegemon, Waltz says: "In international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads others to try to balance against it. With benign intent, the United States has behaved and, until its power is brought into balance, will continue to behave in ways that sometimes frighten others" (2000: 28).

He also attempts to answer the question as to when the new balance of power will emerge. He argues that "Theory enables one to say that a new balance of power will form but not to say how long it will take. National and international conditions determine that. Those who refer to the unipolar moment are right. In our perspective, the new balance is emerging slowly; in historical perspectives, it will come in the blink of an eye" (2000: 30).

In response to the argument that states today seem to prefer to bandwagon rather than balance, which is not in keeping with the neorealist argument, he says:

Whether states bandwagon more often than they balance is an interesting question. To believe that an affirmative answer would refute balance-of-power theory is, however, to misinterpret the theory and to commit what one might call
"the numerical fallacy"—to draw a qualitative conclusion from a quantitative result. States try various strategies for survival. Balancing is one of them; bandwagoning is another. The latter may sometimes seem a less demanding and a more rewarding strategy than balancing, requiring less effort and extracting lower costs while promising concrete rewards. Amid the uncertainties of international politics and the shifting pressures of domestic politics, states have to make perilous choices. They may hope to avoid war by appeasing adversaries, a weak form of bandwagoning, rather than by rearming and realigning to thwart them. Moreover, many states have insufficient resources for balancing and little room for maneuver. They have to jump on the wagon only later to wish they could fall off (2000: 38).

Differences between Classical Realism and Neorealism

There are several major differences between the two major variants of realist thought that ought to be further explored. Schweller, for one, underscores six key differences between classical realists and neorealists:

- First, there is a philosophical disagreement about the roots of realism. Traditional realism is rooted in sociology and history (with some attention to psychology, theology and economics); Neorealism borrows most heavily from macroeconomics;
- Second, traditional realists view power as an end in itself, for neorealists security is the end;
- Third, the basic causal variables are not the same for traditional realists and neorealists. Traditional realists posit that power and the interests of states drive national behaviour; neorealists examine only anarchy and the distribution of capabilities;
- The fourth and fifth differences center on the meaning of ‘capability’. Classical realism is a theory of foreign policy, focusing on the relative distribution of capabilities between specific pairs of states or coalition of states, not on the system wide distribution of capabilities or the polarity of the system. Traditional realists understood capacity to be neither a unit nor structural attribute but rather a relationship between states, such as the potential outcome of military interaction. In contrast, neorealism is a theory of international politics, focusing on the system wide distribution of capabilities, that is, on the polarity of the system by the
number of great powers, not the capacity as a unit level property, indicated by a state's inventory of military forces and those resources that can be transformed into military forces; this concept is then raised to the system level to yield the main explanatory variable of neorealism: system plurality, a structural property that is largely ignored by traditional realists.

Sixth, the two camps disagree over the meaning of the "system". A system refers to "an arrangement of certain components so interrelated as to form a whole" or "sets of elements standing in interactions". For classical realists, the international system is composed of units, interactions, and structure. In neorealism, such process variables are not considered system attributes. Although Waltz defines a system as composed of a structure and of interacting units, his distinction between reductionist theories and systemic theories and his usage of terms like "system theory", and "system level" makes the term system effectively a synonym for structure. (2003: 330-331)

The two strands of realism also understand the international 'system' fundamentally differently. For classical realists, the system is the sum of interactions and practices among states (units determine the system), whereas neorealists see the system as independent from state interaction. In other words, while the system is an independent variable for the neorealists, it is a dependent variable for classical and neoclassical realists.

**Neoclassical Realism**

*Theoretical origins*

As its name suggests, neoclassical realism takes its intellectual roots from classical as well as neorealism. This new direction in realist theorizing has borrowed certain aspects from both of its conceptual precursors and has merged these aspects with fresh theoretical insights. In doing so, it has addressed an area of research that realist thinking has as yet been unable to satisfactorily explain: the domestic aspects (if not roots) of a country's foreign policy. Some of the international phenomena that neoclassical realists cover are grand strategies of individual states, military doctrines, foreign economic policy, alliance
preferences, and crisis behaviour. While Rose calls these thinkers ‘neoclassical realists’, Brian Schmidt calls them ‘modified realists’. Specifically, one key question that has challenged neorealism is why states that are structurally similar and located within the confines of the same international system behave differently. While classical realism does address this question to some extent, it does so without the significant insights of neorealism’s structural arguments. In a similar vein, while classical realism examines in great detail state motivations, state capacity, and attributes of national power, Waltzian neorealists, as Taliaferro points out, preoccupy themselves with the constraints of the international system on state behaviour and take world polarity as the one and only independent variable for their analysis (Taliaferro, 2006: 476).

Waltz’s theory does not concern itself with the internal dynamics of the state; states are identical actors. Waltz’s unitary approach to the state assumes several things about it, for instance, that the state is endowed with certain natural features. It is this assumption that neoclassical realists problematise and on which they devote a large share of their research energy.

Neorealism is strictly a theory of international politics and it does not claim to analyse foreign policy or specific historical events, which many realists charge is a lacuna of the theory. Recognizing this limitation, a new group of realists went back to the pre-Waltzian realist formulations that focused more on domestic factors than the systemic constraints.

As remarked upon above, the intellectual lineage of neoclassical realism can be neatly traced back to classical realism and neorealism. While it adopts the strengths of both, it also tries to dispense with their inadequacies. Schweller writes:

...a new school of realism, variously called neoclassical or neotraditional realism, has attempted to place the rich but scattered ideas and untested assertions of early realist work with in a more theoretically rigorous framework. ... There are several reasons for the emergence of neoclassical realism. Waltzian neorealism is strictly a theory of international politics, which accordingly makes no claim to explain foreign policy or specific historical events. Recognizing such limitations, a new breed of realist scholars
has embraced the richer formulations of traditional, pre-Waltzian realists, who focused more on foreign policy than systemic level phenomena. While not abandoning Waltz’s insights about international structure and its consequences, neoclassical realists have added first and second level variables (e.g., domestic politics, internal extraction capability and processes, state power and intentions and leaders perceptions of the relative distribution of capabilities and of the offense-defence balance) to explain foreign policy decision making and intrinsically important historical puzzles (Schweller, 2003: 316-7).

While Waltzian realism tends to treat all great powers as like units (‘functional similarity’), classical realism made two key distinctions between them based on their capabilities and interests, as well as their satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Schweller, 1998: 15). Thus as Schweller argues, “...Waltzian neorealism suffers from a status-quo bias, that is, it views the world solely through the lens of a satisfied established state” (Schweller, 1998: 20).

Neoclassical realism, doing away with the shortcomings of both the dominant traditions of realism, therefore, begins its theorizing from a structure-informed balance-of-power weltanschauung (as laid down by neorealism) but goes on to argue, like classical realism, that power and behaviour vary across states.

In its haste to be parsimonious and form a meta-theory of international politics, neorealism skips the crucial question that many neoclassical realists see as the core of their inquiry: why is there no consistency with regards to similar and dissimilar states producing similar and dissimilar effects and outcomes in the international arena? As Lobell et al. point out, “the same causes sometimes lead to different effects, and the same effects sometimes follow from different causes” (Lobell et al., 2009: 21).

National power is something that neorealism takes for granted. The theory assures us that national power will automatically come into play when states interact because we live in a neorealist world of structural constraints and incentives. Classical realists, on the other hand, delineate the multiple dimensions of national power; natural resources, military preparedness, geography, national character, population, national morale, and industrial
capacity are all considered components of national power by Morgenthau. He further
develops the concept of national power from being an end, and as such an immediate aim
in the typical Hobbesian sense, to being a means to that end (Morgenthau, 1968: 25). In
doing so, classical realists are able to point to circumstances where national power can be
influential.

This understanding of national power is picked up by neoclassical realists for further
refinement. Schweller argues that:

Although national power has many bases that vary over time and space, one may
conveniently divide them into two dimensions: the material and administration. The first includes familiar elements such as population size, territory, number of
armed forces, as well as the type, level of development, and scale of the nation's
economy. The second and mostly overlooked dimension of national power is the
administrative capacity and the political structure of the state – its ability to
command the population and to tap their resources: the quality of its institutions
of its government; the nature and attitude of political classes which influence its
decisions and the elite which takes them (2006: 13).

In other words, according to this strand of realist theorizing, foreign policy making is not
a passive reaction to structural constraints and incentives. It is also a product of elites’
preferences and perceptions of the external environment; which of the elites’ preferences
and perceptions matter in the policy making process; the domestic political risks with
certain foreign policy choices, and; the variable risk-taking propensities of national elites
(Schweller, 2006: 46).

One of the important claims of the school is that states do not strive for security, like the
neo-realists argue, nor are they striving for power, like the classical realists assert they
do: states strive for influence. Rose points out:

[I]Instead of assuming that states seek security, neoclassical realists assume that
states respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by seeking to control
and shape their external environment. Regardless of the myriad ways that states
may define their interests, this school argues, they are likely to want more rather
than less external influence, and pursue such influence to the extent that they are
able to do so” (1998: 152).
Some of the important questions addressed by neoclassical realism are the following: Under what conditions do nations expand their political interests abroad?; What is the relationship between a nation's external behaviour and its domestic mobilization?; How do political elites perceive and think about power in world politics?; How do states assess and adapt to changes in their relative power?; How do states respond to threats and opportunities in their external environment, and do different kinds of states respond in different ways?; What explains variation in state alliance strategies, whether they choose to balance, buck-pass, bandwagon, chain-gang, or avoid alliances altogether? (Schweller, 2003: 317-8).

Key arguments put forward by neoclassical realism

Neorealism describes the structural dynamics of the international system and argues that states are socialized and familiarized by systemic dynamics, but in response to nothing other than these systemic dynamics. Neoclassical realism's intellectual vocation springs forth from this critical location of neorealist theorizing, which discusses the factors that drive state actions in the international system, while not making claims about "explaining broad patterns of systemic or recurring outcomes" (Lobell et al., 2009, 21). Lobell et al. further address the important question of national behaviour by incorporating the first, second and third image variables in international relations.

As pointed out above, neoclassical realism problematises the 'unitary actor model' of neorealism in that it understands the state as an actor. It argues that "[e]lite consensus or disagreement about the nature and extent of international threats, persistent internal divisions within the leadership, social cohesion, and the regime vulnerability to violent overthrow all inhibit the state's ability to respond to systemic pressures" (Lobell et al., 2009: 28).

By appreciating the links and subsequent interplay between the variables belonging to the three images, neoclassical realism positively complicates and allows for a far more nuanced and multifaceted study to be undertaken by the foreign policy analyst. Its
assumption, as pointed out earlier, that states react differently to similar structural constraints and incentives, also works to describe more accurately this often unremarked upon behaviour. Neoclassical realists argue the cause of this variation can be found in the complex dynamics that occur within states. Schweller argues, "...complex domestic structures and political processes act as transmission belts that channel, mediate, and (re)direct policy outputs in response to external forces". "Hence", he says, "states often react differently to similar systemic pressures and opportunities, and their responses may be less motivated by systemic level factors than domestic ones" (2006: 6). Notice the phrase 'transmission belts' here. It is significant because neoclassical realism only claims to analyse domestic variables that have a systemic linkage. The pre-existing domestic structures, ideologies, and political and strategic cultures, are analysed by neoclassical realism only in so far as they form part of the 'transmission belt', not as generating pressures, constraints and incentives on their own. In other words, neoclassical realism takes into consideration only those domestic variables that are intervening variables, not those which are causal variables if and of themselves.

The 'transmission belt', as Lobell et al. point out, is an imperfect one: "Neoclassical realism posits an imperfect "transmission" belt between systemic incentives and constraints, on the one hand, and the actual diplomatic, military and foreign economic policies states undertake, on the other" (2009: 4).

Sometimes even when states correctly perceive structural pressures as behaving in a particular manner, it may not be possible for them to do what they wish due to domestic constraints (Lobell et al., 2009: 32). More so, "elite perceptions and calculations of international pressures and a lack of consensus within the top leadership and national security bureaucracies often slow the process of net assessment" (Lobell et al., 2009: 32). In other words, on the one hand, persisting domestic ideational structures can prevent a state from arriving at a proper assessment of the structural conditions, and on the other hand these selfsame pre-existing domestic ideational structures can prevent states from acting in a certain manner even if their perceptions of the structural conditions are accurate.
Neoclassical realists also deconstruct the term ‘power’. Power, for neoclassical realism, is not that which exists somewhat intangibly within a state’s borders, in material terms, but rather it is something that can be used productively. Furthermore, the neoclassicalists argue, there is a great gap between raw power and usable power.

Schweller writes,

...material factors alone do not determine the actual level of state power or its place in the international pecking order. They do not tell us whether a state will be able to mobilize these resources and do so in a timely manner in order to respond successfully to structural-systemic incentives and opportunities. Nor do they tell us the purpose of state action, that is, whether a state is willing to pursue a dynamic foreign policy or aspires to some form of political hegemony. For this we need to know something about the internal or domestic makeup of the state; more specifically, we need to know whether or not there are constraints on the development and exercise of the state’s potential power and whether there is a natural will to amass power (2006: 106).

Taliaferro argues that “neoclassical realism suggests that state power – the relative ability of the state to extract or mobilize resources from domestic society as determined by the institution of the state, as well as by nationalism and ideology – shapes the types of internal balancing strategies a state is likely to pursue” (2006: 457). Zakaria too considers the resource extraction capability model (1998).

In his book Unanswered Threats, Schweller further describes the extraction capability of the state. He discusses four factors at the domestic level that may influence the balancing behaviour of states. These factors can also be looked at while trying to understand the foreign policy choices that countries make. These factors include:

1. Elite consensus: Elite consensus is understood to be “a measure of the similarity of elites’ preferences over outcomes and their beliefs about the preferences and anticipated actions of others” (Schweller, 2006: 47). According to Schweller the key questions regarding elite consensus with regard to balancing behaviour are:
a. Do policy elites agree that there is an external military threat?
b. Do they agree about the nature and extent of the threat?
c. Do elites agree about which policy remedy will be most effective and appropriate to deal with a threat and protect a state’s strategic interests?
d. Do they agree on the domestic political risks and costs associated with the range of policy options to balance a threat? (2006: 47)  

2. Elite cohesion and elite polarization: “Elite cohesion refers to the degree to which a central government’s political leadership is fragmented by persistent internal divisions. Elite polarization may arise over ideological, cultural or religious dimensions, bureaucratic interests, party factions, regional and sectoral interests, or ethnic groups and class loyalties” (2006: 11-12).

3. Social cohesion. One way to gauge a society’s cohesion is to observe, for example, whether the general populace considers that “society’s institutions as legitimate and appropriate mechanisms to settle disputes among them no matter how profound their grievances” (2006: 51). This can be seen through a number of factors, for instance in liberal democracies, to give just one example, it could be argued that citizens’ participation through their observance of the state’s laws indicates a level of social cohesion rooted in perceived legitimacy. Schweller lays down five relevant questions that may be asked regarding social cohesion and balancing behaviour:

a. Is there a struggle among elites for domestic political power?

8 Zakaria writes on similar lines. Elite perceptions of the international phenomena hold an important place in the neoclassical understanding. In other words, as Zakaria points out, purely material analysis (military capability, for example) in insufficient to explain state behaviour because: “Statesmen, not states, are the primary actors in international affairs, and their perception of shifts in power, rather then objective measures, are critical” (1998: 42).
b. If so, are there opportunistic elites within the threatened states who are willing to collaborate with the enemy to advance their own personal power or to gain office?
c. If there are multiple threats do elites agree on their rankings of external threats from the most to least dangerous to the state’s survival and vital interests?
d. Are there deep disagreements among elites regarding the question of with whom should the state align?
e. Are elites divided over the issue of whether to devote scarce resources to defend interests in the peripheries or the core? (2006: 54)

4. Regime vulnerability. A regime that is not vulnerable is one that is able to both mobilize and allocate resources to meet its policy commitments, has considerable leverage over activities and groups in the society, maintains autonomy from pressure groups operational from within and outside, and has legitimacy and the compliance of its people (2006: 108). The foreign policy capacity of vulnerable regimes and weak leaders is severely limited. Undue interference from domestic forces hinders the policing capacity of a state, though concurrently it is true that “a political regime that expresses the interests of only one social group is less autonomous than one that encompasses the interests of several social groups” (2006: 107).

Neoclassical realism is also cognizant of the importance of cultural factors in understanding the domestic dynamics that influence states’ foreign policy making. Colin Dueck argues that in the context of grand strategy formation, “culture shapes strategic choices in several ways. First, culture influences the manner in which international events, pressures, and conditions are perceived. Second, it provides a set of causal beliefs regarding the efficient pursuit of national interests. Third, it helps determine the actual definition of these interests, by providing prescriptive foreign policy goals” (2006: 15).
Within the neoclassical realist framework, this means that cultural factors can help specify and explain the final choices made by foreign policy makers when faced with systemic conditions (Dueck 2006: 18-19). Dueck further looks at the process that takes place in a neoclassical realist framework by which strategic culture influences strategic choice. He says it is twofold: “First, foreign policy officials need domestic support for any new departure in grand strategy... And if national culture assumptions regarding grand strategy are either shared or shaped by elite officials, then the beliefs of those officials are a second means by which culture can act as an important influence on patterns of strategic choice” (2006: 19).

Culture directs the formation of nationalism, and cultural nationalism is perhaps more influential in the public parlance than civic nationalism. Given the importance neoclassical realism gives to cultural aspects, it could be argued that a country with high levels of cultural nationalism is more able to respond coherently and dynamically to external circumstances. Schweller argues that fascism worked extremely well as a tool to mobilize national resources for the expansion of Germany (2006: 105). He points out that “...the exemplary mobilizing state was best captured, in practice, by the fascist state. In the modern age of mass politics, fascism provided the necessary political content missing from realism to implement the principle that states should expand when they can” (2006: 105).

The importance of nationalist sentiments/ideology is commented upon by other analysts as well. Taliaferro points out that a state’s ability to ‘emulate and innovate’ can be limited by the absence of nationalist sentiments or the presence of anti-statist ideology. ‘Ideologically vulnerable’ states’, according to him, do not look beyond prominent existing strategies (2006: 467). Therefore, he argues, that “[p]articularly during periods of high external vulnerability, leaders have an incentive to inculcate nationalism as a means to extract greater societal resources for the production of military power” (2006: 491-2). Taliaferro identifies state-sponsored nationalism and ideology as two important elements of national power. While state-sponsored nationalism increases social cohesion thereby facilitating “leaders’ efforts to extract and mobilize resources from society for national
security goals”, ideology, on the other hand, can both “facilitate or inhibit leaders’ efforts to extract and mobilize resources, depending on the content of that ideology and the extent to which elites and the public hold common ideas about the proper role of the state vis-à-vis society and the enemy” (Taliaferro, 2006: 491).

Brian Rathbun argues that in neoclassical realist thinking nationalism is explained by the fact that “[m]obilisation is served by the formation of a collective identity, particularly one juxtaposed negatively to potential adversaries” (2008: 303).

All these arguments make one thing amply clear: cultural factors matter in foreign policy making, even in the realist literature. Neorealism relied a great deal on the conceptual tools of rational choice theory and neoclassical realist scholarship is now attempting to compensate for this over-reliance by incorporating cultural factors into its analytical framework.

Neoclassical realism also states that democracies suffer from some significant inadequacies that prevent them from balancing against external threats (and by implication to other structural incentives and constraints) because “non-balancing behaviour is (or should be) the status-quo policy prior to the emergence of a dangerous threat and there are typically many ‘veto players’ in a democratic policy-making process, that is, individual or collective actors whose agreement is necessary for change in the status quo” (Schweller, 2006: 48). Thus normal democracies tend to be status-quoist, unless, of course, there are other elements (such as nationalist feelings) that prompt a state to be disruptive.

Realism, Security and Defense
Do states look for security or power and domination? In answering this important question, realists have been sharply divided. On the one hand, classical realists and neorealists differ on the motivations behind state behaviour, with classical realists arguing that states look for power for the sake of power, and neorealists arguing that states are looking to increase their security. On the other hand, there are defensive and
offensive variants both in neorealism and neoclassical realism, with defensive realists arguing that states seek sufficient power, would like to maintain balance of power, and that great powers do in fact cooperate. Offensive realists in both schools argue that states seek hegemonic power, look for ways to maximize power, and desire expansion.

Within Neorealism, the Waltzian balance of power theory is the best example of states looking for security which says that weaker states would balance the preponderance of the more powerful ones to ensure that the latter do not become too powerful and dominate all others states in the system. Balance of power, therefore, is not meant to maximize a state’s power but ensure its security. Waltz makes it clear that international politics is a realm of power only because of struggle and survival when he writes that “international politics is the realm of power, of struggle, and of accommodation” (1979: 113). Neorealism takes its philosophical roots from Thomas Hobbes who unlike John Locke said that the struggle for power is not due to human nature but international anarchy. Hobbes argues that human beings acquire more power because “he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more” (1985: 161).

Explaining balance of power, Waltz writes:

A balance of power theory, properly stated, begins with assumptions of states: They are unitary actors who, at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination. States, or those who act for them, try in more or less sensible ways to use the means available in order to achieve the ends in view. Those means fall into two categories: internal efforts (moves to increase economic capability, to increase military strength, to develop clever strategies) and external efforts (moves to strengthen and enlarge one’s own alliance or to weaken and shrink an opposing one) (1979: 118).

Waltz also stresses that a balance of power in the international system does not necessarily equate to rational behaviour:
A self-help system is one in which those who do not help themselves, or who do so less effectively than others, will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to dangers, will suffer. Fear of such unwanted consequences stimulates states to behave in ways that tend toward the creation of balances of power. Notice that the theory requires no assumptions of rationality or of constancy of will on the part of all the actors. The theory says simply that if some do relatively well, others will emulate them or fall by the wayside (1979: 118).

Robert Keohane (1986: 174) explains this neorealist argument clearly:

"[S]tates concerned with self-preservation do not seek to maximise their power when they are not in danger. On the contrary, they recognize a trade-off between aggrandizement and self-preservation; they realize that a relentless search for universal domination may jeopardize their own autonomy. They moderate their efforts when their positions are secure. Conversely, they intensify their efforts when danger arises, which assumes that they were not maximizing them under more benign conditions."

Stephan Walt, another neorealist, seeks to improve upon balance of power theory and puts forward a balance of threat theory. His theory argues that balancing behaviour among states is a result of imbalances of threat and not power. In other words, states balance against threats, and not against power. In this regard, his concept of threat includes "perceived state intentions" rather than the pure power that an opponent has (Walt 1987). Walt argues that balance of threat theory "can explain not only why a state may align against the strongest power (if its power makes it the most dangerous) but also why one state may balance against another state which is not necessarily the strongest but which is seen as more threatening on account of its proximity, aggressive intentions, or acquisition of especially potent means of conquest" (1997: 933).

Security is the prime motivation of states, according to defensive realists. They can gain security by adopting a defensive posture, which has a natural advantage as states generally want to have security. Defensive realism argues that survival in an anarchic system will transform states into defensive positionalists or status quo states. The

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9 The aggregate power that the (enemy) state possesses, its geographic proximity, offensive capability and the perceived aggressiveness of its intentions define the threat a state faces from another state, according to Walt.
problems of the security dilemma and the need to avoid it is the starting point of defensive realists. On the other hand, offensive realists think that there are enough incentives in the international system to be aggressive and thus offensive posturing by states is natural and need not be treated as an anomaly.

According to defensive realism, “states ought to generally pursue moderate strategies as the best route to security” (Taliaferro 2000/2001: 129). States’ search for security and the consequent likelihood of conflict among them is further nuanced by defensive realists. They consider structural modifiers such as the offense-defense balance, material power, and domestic politics as more capable of influencing the likelihood of international conflict or cooperation than gross distribution of power (Taliaferro 2000/2001: 137). Evan Braden Montgomery also argues that the offense-defense balance and offense-defense differentiation are relied upon by defensive realists to understand state behaviour and intentions better¹⁰ (2006: 154). In other words, it is not the naked lust for power that motivates state behavior; there are myriad other factors.

Defensive realism also challenges the widely accepted realist doctrine that security dilemma, as a rule, gives rise to intense conflict. It says that cooperation is risky (as the offensive realists would say) but so is competition. Defensive realists further argue that no state can be certain of the result of arms races, or war prior to launching it (Taliaferro 2000/2001: 138). Taliaferro points out that “The defensive variants of Neorealism and Neoclassical Realism specify the conditions under which cooperative international outcomes and less competitive state behaviour, respectively, become more likely” (2000/2001: 139).

Defensive realism calls for reassurance measures on the part of states. If security is all that a state aspires to it must ensure that others in the system are operating under the same assumption, and are aware that it is seeking this security. A state should therefore execute

¹⁰ Montgomery defines offense-defense balance and offense-defense differentiation as the following: “The offense-defense balance generally refer to the relative effectiveness offensive versus defense forces and doctrines, as determined primarily by military technology and geography. Offense-defense differentiation refers to the ability to distinguish between offensive and defensive postures” (2006: 154).
acts that reveal its motivation. Montgomery writes that "a relative decrease in a state’s capabilities can increase its security by revealing its benign motives, which will in turn reduce the adversary’s insecurity and decrease its need for aggressive policies." (Montgomery 2006: 160-161)

Along with reducing offensive weapons, a defensive state should deploy defensive forces to protect its territory. Thus "the combination of differentiation and defensive advantage will create a “doubly safe” world in which aggression and offense become difficult, motivations are transparent, and the security dilemma is effectively eliminated" (Montgomery 2006: 163).

Charles Glaser is another important champion of defensive realism in the neorealist tradition. He argues that "[S]tructural realism properly understood predicts that, under a wide range of conditions, adversaries can best achieve their security goals through cooperative policies, not competitive ones, and should, therefore, choose cooperation when these conditions prevail" (1994-1995: 51).

In order to emphasize his thesis, Glaser propounds what he calls the contingent-realist argument which attempts to, one, eliminate the unwarranted bias towards competition in realism; two, focus on military capabilities than on power; three, recognize that the rational-actor assumptions that form the foundation of structural realism allow states to use military policy to communicate information about their motives. As a result, he argues, "states seeking security should see benefits in cooperative policies that can communicate benign motives" (Glaser 1994-1995: 58).

Robert Jervis asks the most pertinent question as to what motivates states to cooperate despite the existence of security dilemmas and overarching anarchy, which in combination are likely to make cooperation among states apparently improbable. He reasons that the greater the benefits of cooperation and the costs of war, the more likely states are to cooperate. He also writes that when it is possible to distinguish defensive
weapons and they have an advantage, the security dilemma is lessened; but when offensive weapons hold the advantage, the security dilemma is increased (1978: 211).

Using the logic of offense-defense balance and the ability to distinguish between offensive-defensive postures, Jervis says that when defensive posture is absent or indistinguishable and offensive posture is obvious, there is a high probability of confrontation and cooperation is not a possibility. Yet if offensive posture is indistinguishable and defensive posture is obvious, then there is a real possibility of cooperation (Jervis 1978).

He also writes on the possibility of cooperation among states under anarchic conditions saying: “Even if international politics must remain a Prisoners’ Dilemma, it can often be made into one that is more benign by altering the pay-offs to encourage cooperation, for example, by enhancing each state’s ability to protect itself should the other seek to exploit it and increasing the transparency that allows each to see what the other side is doing and understand why it is doing it” (1998: 987).

Exploring the underlying reasons for states’ quest for power, Jervis goes on to say that “often states would be willing to settle for the status quo and are driven more by fear than by the desire to make gains” (1999: 49).

Jack Snyder in his 1991 book, Myths of Empire, says that the international system gives incentives only for moderate and reasonable behaviour. State behaviour contradicting this ‘normal’ behaviour, according to him, contradicts ‘true’ systemic incentives.

**Realism, Power and Domination**

For most realists, understanding states’ search for power has been key to understanding international politics. Mearsheimer writes, “calculations about power lie at the heart of how states think about the world around them” (2001: 12). In contrast to what defensive realists would argue, offensive realists reason that states, as a rule, seek power and domination in the international arena. As Mearsheimer points out, “offensive realism
parts company with defensive realism over the question of how much power states want” (2001: 21). However, power is not uniformly understood by all realists. As Brian C. Schmidt asserts “Some realists define power in terms of measurable attributes, such as the size of a country’s population and military forces, while others define power in a relational manner as the ability to exercise influence over other actors in the international system. Power is considered by some realists to be an end in itself, while others assert that it is a means to an end” (Schmidt 2005: 525 - 526).

Classical realism holds power to be the driving force behind international politics. According to Morgenthau, “international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for Power” (1954: 25). He not only emphasizes power as a key propellant, but also suggests this situation is inescapable because it is rooted in human nature. He famously puts forth the notion that “politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature” (1954: 4). Another influential classical realist, Carr saw and equated international politics with power politics. Carr, in the true classical realist spirit, argued that military power was both a means and an end in itself (1939: 109).

According to offensive realism, anarchy gives states strong incentives for expansion. Survival in an anarchic system is guaranteed only for the most powerful states and so they should constantly strive to gain the maximum amount of power in order to survive. Jeffrey Taliaferro clearly spells out this fear when he says, “states under anarchy face the ever-present threat that other states will use force to harm or conquer them. This compels states to improve their relative power positions through arms buildsups, unilateral diplomacy, mercantile (or even autarkic) foreign economic policies, and opportunistic expansion” (2000/2001: 129).

Uncertainty, according to Montgomery, is at the heart of the security dilemma. “Offensive structural realism,” according to him, “assumes that uncertainty is complete and invariant, as well as a determinative constraint on state behavior” (2006: 151). Sean Lynn-Jones observes offensive realists arguing that the international system engenders conflict and aggression. Security is a scarce commodity, which makes competition and
war possibilities among states. States, therefore, are compelled to adopt offensive strategies to secure themselves (Lynn-Jones 1998: 157). The impact of anarchy becomes most severe when there is inadequate information about the intentions of other countries. This forces states to speculate as to what course of action their potential attackers may take by assessing their opponents' power and how much harm they might do to them (Montgomery 2006:155). Combined with the fact that every state is assumed to possess some offensive capability at all points of time and one cannot be sure of peaceful motives by another state, this ensures that there is no strategy of reassurance in offensive realism (Montgomery 2006: 155). Therefore, in order to ensure survival “states act as if their rivals are aggressive and continually attempt to increase their relative power, ensuring that the security dilemma will remain severe” (Montgomery 2006: 155).

The focus here is on power capabilities not intentions of states as the latter, offensive realists would argue, are difficult to gauge due to uncertainty and the normal secrecy surrounding the defense plans of countries. Thus the driving forces of offensive realism are anarchy, uncertainty, fear, quest for survival and the consequent offensive posturing. While defensive realists believe that status quo states are more numerous, offensive realists believe that revisionist states are the norm.

For Schweller, there are different kinds of states in the international system: strong status quo states11 (termed as lions), strong revisionists (wolves) and in between there are ‘doves’, ‘ostriches’, and ‘foxes’. He finds fault with much of the contemporary realist theory, which he says “views the world solely though the lens of a satisfied, status-quo state” (1994: 85-86).

Schweller would like Walt’s balance of threat theory (itself an improvement upon the traditional balance of power theory) to be extended one step further and be called “balance-of-interests” theory. Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik point out that “with

11 He defines status-quo states as those powers who “seek self-preservation and the protection of values they already possess; they are security maximisers, not power maximisers. Revisionist states, on the other hand, are those states who “value what they covet more than what they currently possess, although this ratio may vary considerably among their ranks; they will employ military force to change the status-quo and to extend their values. (1994: 85-86).
this analysis, Schweller reverses the causal arrow of realism. Rather than arguing, as have realists for centuries, that the distribution of power influences state behaviour despite varying preferences, he offers a compelling and creative account of how governments adjust their power to their preferences” (1999: 30).

Schweller argues that great powers have always tended to expand whenever they could, not necessarily to satisfy an innate lust for power, prestige, and glory, but out of compulsion because anarchy requires states to enhance their security and influence over others whenever and wherever possible (2001: 174).

Gilpin has a theoretically different view of the system and calls it ‘hegemonic governance’. Gilpin, unlike Waltz and realists in general, does not start with the understanding of an anarchic international system (where there is no differentiation of function among states) but one that is characterized by hegemonic governance. More importantly, Gilpin’s model understands the international system as characterized by the social formations of the given milieu. According to Gilpin, states in the international system pursue three general objectives: (i) conquest of territory; (ii) increase their influence over the behavior of others; (iii) control or at least exercise influence over the world economy (1981: 24). He discusses anarchy only to the extent of saying that “although the international system is one of anarchy (i.e., the absence of a formal governmental authority) the system does exercise an element of control over the behaviour of states” (1981: 28). Gilpin also writes about control mechanisms within the international system such as division of territory, international economy, hierarchy of prestige, and great power dominance (distribution of power).

The stability of the international system depends on the power asymmetry therein. In such a power-asymmetric situation the hegemon provides ‘public goods’ to the system. When both the hegemon and the system benefit from the power distribution, there is in existence that Gilpin calls ‘hegemonic stability’.
Also significant is the fact that Gilpin tries to locate politics outside the realm of mere military power, as realists would normally define it. He tries to locate the “dynamics of power in a wider historical and socioeconomic sense and to define politics outside of the classical realm of diplomacy/warfare” (Stefano Guzzini 2002: 12).

The idea of state expansion, in Gilpin’s thinking, stems from the fact that there is no inherent war prone-ness or war hatred that states possess: states are likely to go to war if the expected benefits exceed the expected costs of going to war. In other words, an international system is stable if no state believes it is profitable to attempt to change it (Gilpin 1981: 11). Gilpin also reasons that hegemony is the fundamental ordering principle of the international system. A hegemonic system provides relative peace and security, enforces the rules of a (liberal) international economic order and maintains the international monetary system. The principle method of systemic change through history has been hegemonic war - war to reorder the international system (1981: 15).


The key question that Zakaria tries to answer in his book is “under what conditions do states expand their political interests abroad?” (1998: 8). Zakaria’s state-centered realism is based on the argument that as a state becomes relatively more powerful, it expands in order to maximize its influence and control its international environment (Lynn-Jones 1998: 161). Zakaria explains his thesis as follows: “In the anarchic, nonhierarchical international environment, states are driven by the system’s competitive imperative: if a state does not attempt to maximize its influence, then another will seize the opportunity instead” (1998: 29). It is this reference to the systemic imperative that makes Lynn-Jones classify the Zakaria’s state-centered realism as an example of an offensive variant of neorealism, not classical realism (1998: 162).
Zakaria introduces two more variables to his offensive realist theory. One, he argues that states expand "in a rational way, measuring risks, opportunities, costs, and benefits" (1998: 20). Two, he posits that it is the state-society relationship that determines how much national power can be used for foreign policy purposes. Zakaria says that "state power - the scope, autonomy, cohesion, and extractive capabilities of the state - must be taken into account in assessing the impact of changes in national power" (1998: 35-41). In other words, powerful states do not necessarily expand but do so only when their central governments have sufficient strength to extract from society the resources required to support the expansion.

An important hypothesis of Zakaria's theory is that states' intentions vis-à-vis other powers become aggressive when key decision makers of that state perceive a relative increase in state power (1998: 42). This is unlike the defensive realist argument, which goes as follows: "Nations try to expand their political interests abroad when central decision-makers perceive an increase in threats" (Zakaria 1998: 42, cited in Lynn-Jones 1998: 163-4).

Zakaria disputes classical realism's emphasis on national power as the most important factor affecting a nation's foreign policy, saying that foreign policy is made not by the nation as a whole but by its government. Therefore, what needs to be taken into account is state power, not national power. Zakaria's offensive logic claims that capabilities shape intentions, even as it recognizes that state structure limits the availability of national power. Therefore, when examining the behaviour of states in world politics, the structure, scope, and capacity of the state need to be examined carefully (Zakaria 1998: 38-19). Zakaria also notes that "[s]tatesmen, not nations, confront the international system, and they have access to only that fraction of national power that the state apparatus can extract for its purpose" (1998: 35).

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12 State power is defined by him as "State power is that portion of national power the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which central decision-makers can achieve their ends." (Zakaria 1998)
The most significant limitation of state-centered realism, however, is that the theory cannot (or does not) say anything about a state's expansion apart from merely stating that increased power leads to expansion: but how great is this expansion and does it lead to war? What factors cause states to engage in acute and self-defeating overexpansion? State-centered realism has difficulty explaining the magnitude and character of expansion because it relies entirely on changes in levels of relative national (and state) power to explain expansion. In practice, however, states are most likely to expand when opportunity combines with motive to make expansion an attractive route to security (Lynn-Jones 1998: 179-80).

Mearsheimer, as another prominent offensive realist, makes the basic argument that it is the nature of the international system which provides incentives to states to pursue hegemony. He writes: “Blackmail and war are the main strategies that states employ to acquire power, and balancing and buck-passing are the principal strategies that great powers use to maintain the distribution of power when facing a dangerous rival” (2001: 13). Mearsheimer also maintains that great powers are always on the lookout for opportunities to increase their power vis-à-vis their enemies with the desire to gain hegemony at some point of time (2001: 29). He makes five assumptions based on which his theory progresses:

1. the international system is anarchic;
2. great powers inherently possess some offensive military capability, which gives them the wherewithal to hurt, and possibly destroy each other. States are potentially dangerous to each other;
3. states can never be certain about other states’ intentions;
4. survival is the primary goal of the great powers;
5. great powers are rational actors (2001: 30-31).

When these five assumptions are clubbed together, he argues, there are enough powerful incentives for great powers to adopt offensive postures. As a result, there emerge three general patterns of behaviour: fear, self-help, and power maximization (Mearsheimer
2001: 32). However this does not mean that Mearsheimer proposes the world to be an arena of constant wars. It is “a state of relentless security competition, with the possibility of war always in the background” (Mearsheimer 1995: 336). Not only great powers have aggressive intentions, Mearsheimer presupposes, but they also engage in zero-sum games, as a rule (2001: 34). In a zero-sum world with aggressive states all around, the best policy is to be the hegemon in the system (Mearsheimer 2001: 34), because one doesn’t know how much power will suffice in the days to come (Mearsheimer 2001: 35). As Snyder explains, according to Mearsheimer, “great powers require a surplus power over ‘appropriateness’ to cover uncertainties, possible miscalculation, and future surprises” (2002: 155)

Uncertainty, lack of information and resultant inability to calculate how much power is enough, leads great powers to recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony. Thus, “states do not become status-quo powers until they completely dominate the system.” (Mearsheimer 2001: 35). Mearsheimer goes on to argue that “the best way for a state to survive in anarchy is to take advantage of other states and gain power at their expense” (2001: 36). Indeed, even after achieving hegemony, the hegemonic power may yet remain unsatisfied. Mearsheimer argues that a hegemon will strive to prevent the rise of other hegemons (2001: 41-42). Rebutting the Waltzian claim that states only desire security and thus once security is achieved, they are unlikely to continue to engage in conflictual relationships with other states, Mearsheimer says that a state with an advantage over the others will be more aggressive in their behaviour because they have “the capability and the incentive to do so” (2001: 37). Waltz’s argument against this would be that “states balance power rather than maximize it. States can seldom afford to make maximum power their goal. International politics is too serious a business for that” (Waltz 1979: 127).

Mearsheimer further argues that great powers do not inherently think or act offensively, but rather they respond to the structure of the international system; it is such that it forces

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13 Mearsheimer talks about ‘hegemon’ and ‘potential hegemon’. Only a state with clear-cut nuclear superiority can be a global hegemon which makes it difficult for states to achieve global hegemony. However, there can be regional hegemons (Glenn Snyder, 2002: 145 and 152).
them to be offensive (: 53). He writes: “Great powers behave aggressively not because they want to or because they possess some inner drive to dominate, but because they have to seek more power if they want to maximize their odds of survival” (2001: 21).

Mearsheimer, like many offensive realists, argues that Waltzian realism is too defensive in nature. In the words of Snyder, “Mearsheimer and Schweller are correct that Waltzian Neorealism is primarily a theory about how defensively oriented states behave in response to structural constraints” (2002: 152).

This theory of state aggression, however, does make occasional references to ‘cooperation’ among states but only when a cost-benefit analysis does not support going to war. Only fear of sure defeat can deter states from being aggressive. According to Mearsheimer:

[T]his competitive world is peaceful when it is obvious that the costs of going to war are high, and the benefits of going to war are low. Two aspects of military power are at the heart of this incentive structure: the distribution of power between states, and the nature of the military power available to them. The distribution of power between states tells us how well-positioned states are to commit aggression and whether other states are able to check this aggression. This distribution is a function of the number of poles in the system, and their relative power. The nature of military power directly affects the costs, risks and benefits of going to war. If the military weaponry available guarantees that warfare will be very destructive, states are more likely to be deterred by the costs of war. If available weaponry favours defense over offense, aggressors are likely to be deterred by the futility of aggression, and all states feel less need to commit aggression, since they enjoy greater security to begin with, and therefore feel less need to enhance their security by expansion. If available weaponry tends to equalize the relative power of states, aggressors are discouraged from going to war (1995b: 86).

Realism and the Balancing Behaviour of States
Balance of power is as old as the history of warfare; it has been remarked upon by Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Montesquieu, David Hume, A. F. Pollard and Hans Morgenthau, among others. According to Walt, the “(p)roposition that states will join
alliances in order to avoid domination by stronger powers at the heart of traditional balance of power theory" (1995: 210) Walt argues that states will balance for two reasons:

First, states risk their own survival if they fail to curb a potential hegemon before it becomes too strong. To ally with the dominant power means placing one’s trust in its continued benevolence. The safer strategy is to join with those who cannot readily dominate their allies, in order to avoid being dominated by those who can. Second, joining the more vulnerable side increases the new member’s influence, because the weaker side has greater need for assistance. Joining the stronger side, by contrast, reduces the new member’s influence (because it adds relatively less to the coalition) and leaves it vulnerable to the whims of its new partners. Alignment with the weaker side is thus the preferred choice (1995: 210-211).

Schweller challenges this argument saying that balancing the strong power is not the natural choice of states. He further argues that balancing and bandwagoning behaviour are induced for drastically different reasons: “The aim of balancing is self-preservation and the protection of values already possessed, while the goal of bandwagoning is usually self-extension” (1995: 251).

Morgenthau considers balance of power resulting from the policies of states and not as an impact of the international system. In his book *Politics Among Nations* he defines balance of power as: 1) as a policy aimed at a certain state of affairs; 2) as an actual state of affairs; 3) as an approximately equal state of affairs; 4) as any distribution of power; (1948: 67). More clearly, he wrote that “the aspiration for power on the part of several nations, each trying to maintain or overthrow the status quo, leads of necessity to a configuration that is called the balance of power and to policies that aim at preserving it” (1948: 163).

This concept was redefined by Waltz; Waltzian balance of power theory states that anarchy leads to the formation of balance(s) of power in the international system. Anarchy compels each state to take adequate measures for its survival. According to neorealism, when states compete for the relative power necessary for security, balance of power is born. For Waltz, two requirements need to be met for the existence of balance
of power. There must be an anarchic international system and there must be states wishing to survive therein (Waltz 1979: 121). He argues that “in international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads other states to balance against it” (2000: 28). In other words, “balances of power tend to form whether some or all states consciously aim to establish and maintain a balance, or whether some or all states aim for universal domination” (Waltz 1979: 119).

The opposite of balancing has been defined as bandwagoning - a strategy that smaller states pursue for survival. However, the preferred strategy in neorealist theory is still balancing as opposed to bandwagoning because “the first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system” (Waltz 1979: 126). More so, “because power is a means and not an end; states prefer to join the weaker of the two coalitions” (Waltz 1979: 126).

Waltz writes that the balancing of power, and desisting from over-accumulation of power, are important in international politics because too much of power by one state or coalition invites the opposition of other countries (Waltz 1989: 49). Joining the weaker coalition is a better idea because if a state joins a bandwagon of a rising power it inevitably invokes opposition and subsequently conflict – and states ultimately prefer be secure rather than powerful.

States can increase their capabilities in two ways: internal efforts (which include increasing economic capability, military size, and developing better military strategies) and external efforts (forging alliances with other countries) (Waltz 1979: 118). Waltz thinks that in a bipolar system where two big powers contend, the system allows only for internal balancing for the two in contention. Despite this, Waltz mentions internal balancing but does not explore it theoretically as much as he does external balancing. Other neorealists, such as Walt, do not even address internal balancing.14 Yet Waltz

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14 According to Stephan Walt, “alliance is a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more states. This definition assumes some level of commitment and an exchange of benefits for both parties; severing the relationship or failing to honor the agreement would presumably cost something, even if it were compensated in other ways” (1987:1).
contends that "internal balancing is more reliable and precise than external balancing" (1979: 168).

Apart from multi-polarity, there are three other situations that can invoke internal balancing. Waltz points out that the effectiveness and the cost effectiveness of nuclear weapons lead countries towards internal balancing. At the same time, abandonment may direct a state towards internal balancing.15

Schweller makes a passing reference to internal balancing when he says: "Balancing means the creation or aggregation of military power through internal mobilization or the forging of alliances to prevent or deter the territorial occupation or political and military domination of the state by a foreign power or coalition" (2004: 166).

There is a difference of opinion among realists as to whether states will choose to balance or bandwagon. This debate is highlighted by Walt and Schweller, with the former (and defensive realism in general) arguing that states are likely to balance and join the less threatening coalition. However, Schweller (and most offensive realists) argues that bandwagoning is more common. For him, one of the main reasons why alliances are formed is to gain a share of the spoils, and so bandwagoning occurs more frequently. Schweller says that balancing exists "only when the stakes concern some form of political subjugation or, more directly, the seizure of territory, either one’s homeland or vital interests abroad (e.g., sea-lanes, allies, colonies, etc.)" (2004: 166). Note that he differentiates between balancing and bandwagoning. Unlike both Waltz and Walt who consider bandwagoning as an act of desperation by a weaker side, Schweller reasons that bandwagoning has larger aims attached to it; it is a free choice exercised by a state, rather than something said state has been unavoidably coerced into.

Explaining his argument on the balancing behaviour of states, Schweller writes: "balancing involves a situation in which a state is not directly menaced by a predatory

state but decides to balance against it anyway to protect its long-term security interests” (2004: 166). He distinguishes four distinct categories of balancing behaviour:

1. appropriate balancing, which occurs when the target is a truly dangerous aggressor that cannot or should not be appeased and the state's military capabilities are indispensable to counterbalance the rising state's power;
2. overbalancing (or inappropriate balancing), which unnecessarily triggers a costly and dangerous arms spiral because the target is misperceived as an aggressor;
3. non-balancing, which may take the form of buck-passing, bandwagoning, appeasement, engagement, distancing, or hiding;
4. And underbalancing, which occurs when the state does not balance or does so inefficiently in response to a dangerous and unappeasable aggressor, and the state's efforts are essential to deter or defeat it (2004: 167-8).

Schweller, making a neoclassical realist argument, further asserts that four factors at the domestic political arena will determine the political behaviour of states:

1. elite consensus (disagreement) about the nature and extent of the threat, the political and policy costs and risks, and the policy remedy that will be most effective and appropriate to deal with a threat;
2. elite cohesion (which is) the degree to which a central government's political leadership is fragmented by persistent internal divisions;
3. social cohesion. States with high levels of political and social integration will be most likely to balance against external threats;
4. the degree of regime or government vulnerability is an important factor in determining whether a state will be able to balance effectively (2004: 11-12).

Paul Schroeder also has argued that states have pursued different strategies in history in order to face external threats to their security. He says that states have used strategies
such as 'hiding' (ignoring to balance), 'transcending' (resolving the problems that cause conflict in the first place) and 'bandwagoning' (joining the stronger side for protection and payoffs). Schroeder counters the neorealist argument that states naturally tend to balance in the following words: “I see bandwagoning more historically more common than balancing, particularly by smaller powers” (Schroeder 1994: 117). Balancing is also used by states for security but, Schroeder argues, it is rare and is primarily a last resort.

Conclusion
This chapter attempted at a brief review of the realist understanding of international politics, as well as its various off-shoots: neorealism, classical realism, and so on. Starting with the ancient Greek understanding of realist statecraft, the chapter attempted to shed light on the various strands of realist theorizing that are prevalent in IR today. During the course of the review, it also tried to explain certain important concepts in realism such as power, security and the balancing behaviour of states in greater detail. After this primary analysis, it is clear that one of the less developed concepts in the realist theorizing has been the aspect of internal balancing by states in the absence of adequate opportunities for external balancing. It also bears noting that though there is a realist understanding of world politics, there is no single realist theory of world politics.

The theoretical understanding gained from this chapter on realism in IR will be put to empirical testing in the following two chapters which look at the cases of South Africa and Israel. The attempt, as pointed out earlier, is to test the realist theory of IR in explaining the behaviour of South Africa and Israel in response to their besieged status in the international system.