

## IR Terminology Overview: Levels of Analysis for International Relations

**level of analysis: (definition):** In political science, we use three widely accepted levels of generalization (or abstraction) to help understand highly complex problems in world politics. They are the *individual*, *state* (or, *society*), and the *international system*. In addition, radical scholars such as Marx and Lenin have amended these categories to account for economic problems by focusing on the category of *class*. Finally, alternative approaches have emphasized *text*.

**Power** is probably the concept that collects all the analysts in political science together as a discipline. Therefore, power is the most important concept that we will analyze while we concern ourselves with world politics this semester. We will locate power in all approaches to international politics outlined below. Please pay attention to this concept, locate it in these theories and analyze how it works.

### Idealism

**level of analysis:** *Individual:* moral principles of individuals may translate into that of nations. *&/or form of government:* democratic governments are the preferred means for transferring those moral principles of individuals into those of the international system. Democratic governments exist as moral examples for other nations still struggling on the path to Enlightenment.

Idealists: Immanuel Kant, Woodrow Wilson, (Neville Chamberlain)

### Realism

**level of analysis:** *State:* the power of the state translates into the national interest of that state. States are viewed as 'black boxes.' Any politics within the state (*i.e.*, the form of government) is irrelevant to understanding the states' interests in international society. States are assumed to be power-seeking entities that enter the competition with one another in the absence of central power to overawe them. This situation is anarchy. Anarchy simply means a lack of central power (say Hobbes' *Leviathan*) to which all states would pledge their obedience.

Realists: Thucydides, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Martin Wight, Henry Kissinger, E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, Reinhold Nieburgh, Pat Buchanan (who is also a mercantilist)

### Marxism

**level of analysis:** *Class:* societies (nations) are divided along antagonistic class lines: those who own the means of production, the bourgeois class (e.g. factories and capital), and those who do not the proletarian class. As the bourgeois class, driven by the motive of gaining profit, increasingly alienates the proletarian class from the means of production, these antagonisms grow stronger and stronger until the proletarian class *realizes* its subjugation and rises up against the bourgeois class. This proletarian class seizes the state machinery (the

government) in order to ensure equitable distribution of goods and capital in society. Therefore, Marx views the state as an instrument for imposing the will of the bourgeois class or, in the case of revolution, the proletarian class. It all depends upon which class holds state power.

Marxists: The only Marxist is Marx himself, all others following in his tradition were influenced by the revolutionary impulse provided by Leninism.

### Marxism-Leninism

**level of analysis:** *finance capital*: the bourgeois classes of the richest nations accumulate capital (through hoarding). This capital needs an outlet (i.e. somewhere to be re-invested). These classes form a financial oligarchy in which banks and large industrial corporations merge to dominate underdeveloped portions of the world. The existence of finance capital equals imperialism; they are one and the same. The state is still instrumental (like in Marx) reflecting only the interests of the financial oligarchy. *Therefore, like Marx, class is the central analytic category except this class transcends the level of the state (or, society) and takes on an international character.* There is another difference: the proletarian class cannot come to realization of its alienation and subordination to bourgeois interests as the capitalists create opportunities for the upper tier of this class. This upper tier is called the 'aristocracy of labor.' Therefore, the problem of revolution becomes all the more problematic and urgent. For Lenin, a vanguard party must lead the confused proletariat onto the path of liberation through seizure of the state apparatus (government) and then redistribute goods and wealth throughout society. This party then helps establish a 'dictatorship of the proletariat.' *Thus, the central difference between classical Marxism and Marxism-Leninism is the latter's insistence that revolution precede all theoretical analysis of political economics.*

Marxism-Leninism: Theotonio dos Santos, Rosa Luxembour, Immanuel Wallerstein, Che Guevara, Subcommander Marcos, Mao

### Neorealism

**level of analysis:** *international system*: One of the central propositions of classical realism is that the relations between states are necessarily anarchic as there is no central power (Leviathan, world government) to maintain order and stability. Anarchy simply means a lack of a central power. Neorealism builds on this classical theory making anarchy the *logic* of the international system. In other words, the anarchy of the international system is primary, compelling states to act as self-preserving, power-seeking entities. Thus, the structure (or system) of international politics is what compels states to act in the international system. The theory implies that states no longer have a conscious interest in forming foreign policy but that the best possible policy formulas are determined by the structure of the system itself (anarchy) and the states' place within that system (distribution capabilities).

Neorealists: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Kenneth Waltz, Robert Gilpin

## Neoidealism

**level of analysis:** *international system*: Like classical idealism, neoidealism accepts the notion that peace may be established in international politics through democratic principles applied to real situations. It differs from its classical predecessor in that it views the workings of other states as central to its own survival. Therefore, all states must and will eventually adopt a democratic form of government. Neoidealists actively advocate intervention in the inner workings of other states to promote stability prior to the transfer of democratic principles to that state. A current example is the war in the former Yugoslavia where Secretary of State Albright has argued NATO has a moral interest in stabilizing the regimes. Neoidealists, unlike their classical predecessors, do not use state power to intervene, but instead focus on forming transnational actors (NATO) to act as the democratic force in the interventions. Further, they point to the gradual world acceptance of liberal democratic principles and liberal economic programs to justify their interventions. For them, the democratic path has widened enormously, and it is the job of those in power to help those struggling on it along a little faster than a classical idealist might advise.

Neoidealists: Hegel, Charles W. Kegley, Jr., Madeline Albright, William Cohen, Francis Fukuyama

### **Hegemony:**

According to Gramsci, the definition of “state” is force plus consent. This state is managed by the “historical bloc” those in power who apologize for the way things are while at the same time forming compromises with those populations who might object to state policies.

## Poststructuralism (Constructivism)

**level of analysis:** *text*: For poststructuralists power is not a tangible element that exists in a material actor or institution, but its effects can be measured through its **dispersion** (Weber in *Simulating Sovereignty*, Der Derian *Anti-Diplomacy*, Walker *Inside/Out*, Ashley)

Common division of power by traditional IR/IL scholars:

**Tangible elements of power:** military capability, economic strength, population, technology, intelligence, also law, but only “official law”

**Intangible elements of power:** national will or resolve, power differentials

For example, a classical realist would argue that power resides in the state machinery alone, the tangible elements, are the only important aspect of politics (a “unitary actor”) whereas a poststructuralist would argue that power resides in other venues less amenable to direct or visible criticism such as:

disciplinary practices,

**laws,**

means of surveillance,

educational systems, (e.g., the “sorting machine” of school)

security systems,

public health initiatives,

military strategy,

**court decisions,**

means of punishment, incarceration, e.g., prisons, etc.

For example, the power of the state resides not in the state itself, which is really just an abstraction, but in the govern (mentality) of the **population** within the state. That is, the population's disposition towards being governed.

Is the population heteronomous?

Do they prefer to be led without questioning the information they're getting? Nassar's statement about questioning Peter Jennings.

How does the hegemony work? What are the compromise formations that are enacted in order to get people to agree with hegemony?

NICE FORCE, BENEVOLENCE, FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

Rawls: democracy replaces the splitting of heads with the counting of heads. Goes to "representation" as the most important means to power in IL and International society. If you are represented accurately and officially, then you are on the side of power.

Poststructuralism directly criticizes the Neos for focusing on the international system as if it were a structure that political analysts could locate on a tangible plain through ideas, and classical realists/idealists as if the state were a tangible political object.

Poststructuralists: Ann Marie Slaughter, Michel Foucault, Vaclav Havel, Subcommander Marcos, Owen Harries and terrorist organizations spanning the globe