This chapter sketches the realist tradition in IR. The chapter takes note of an important dichotomy in realist thought between classical and contemporary approaches to realism. Classical and neoclassical realists emphasize the normative aspects of realism as well as the empirical aspects. Most contemporary realists pursue a social scientific analysis of the structures and processes of world politics, but they tend to ignore norms and values. The chapter discusses both classical and contemporary strands of realist thought. It examines a debate among realists concerning the wisdom of NATO expansion into Eastern Europe. It also reviews two critiques of realist doctrine: an 'International Society critique and an emancipatory critique. The concluding section assesses the prospects for the realist tradition as a research programme in IR.
**Introduction: Elements of Realism**

Basic realist ideas and assumptions are: (1) a pessimistic view of human nature; (2) a conviction that international relations are necessarily conflictual and that international conflicts are ultimately resolved by war; (3) a high regard for the values of national security and state survival; and (4) a basic scepticism that there can be progress in international politics that is comparable to that in domestic political life (see web link 3.01). These ideas and assumptions steer the thought of most leading realist IR theorists, both past and present.

In realist thought humans are characterized as being preoccupied with their own well-being in their competitive relations with each other. They desire to be in the driver's seat. They do not wish to be taken advantage of. They consequently strive to have the 'edge' in relations with other people—including international relations with other countries. In that regard at least, human beings are considered to be basically the same everywhere. Thus the desire to enjoy an advantage over others and to avoid domination by others is universal.

This pessimistic view of human nature is strongly evident in the IR theory of Hans Morgenthau (1965; 1985), who was probably the leading realist thinker of the twentieth century. He sees men and women as having a will to power. That is particularly evident in politics and especially international politics: 'Politics is a struggle for power over men, and whatever its ultimate aim may be, power is its immediate goal and the modes of acquiring, maintaining, and demonstrating it determine the technique of political action' (Morgenthau 1965: 195).

Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and indeed all classical realists, share that view to a greater or lesser extent. They believe that the goal of power, the means of power and the uses of power are a central preoccupation of political activity. International politics is thus portrayed as—above all else—'power politics': an arena of rivalry, conflict and war between states in which the same basic problems of defending the national interest and ensuring the continued survival of the state repeat themselves over and over again.

Realists thus operate with a core assumption that world politics unfolds in an international anarchy: i.e. a system with no overarching authority, no world government. The state is the pre-eminent actor in world politics. International relations are primarily relations of states. All other actors in world politics—individuals, international organizations, NGOs, etc.—are either less important or unimportant. The main point of foreign policy is to project and defend the interests of the state in world politics. But states are not equal: on the contrary, there is an international hierarchy of power among states. The most important states in world politics are the great powers. International relations are understood by realists as primarily a struggle between the great powers for domination and security.

The normative core of realism is national security and state survival: these are the values that drive realist doctrine and realist foreign policy. The state is considered to be essential for the good life of its citizens: without a state to guarantee the means and conditions of security and to promote welfare, human life is bound to be, in the famous phrase of Thomas Hobbes (1946: 82), 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. The state is thus seen as a protector of its territory, of the population, and of their distinctive and valued way of life. The national interest is the final arbiter in judging foreign policy. Human society and morality is confined to the state and does not extend into international relations, which is a political arena of considerable turmoil, discord and conflict between states in which the great powers dominate everybody else.

That the fact that all states must pursue their own national interest means that other countries and governments can never be relied upon completely. All international agreements are provisional and conditional on the willingness of states to observe them. All states must be prepared to sacrifice their international obligations on the altar of their own self-interest if the two come into conflict. That makes treaties and all other agreements, conventions, customs, rules, laws and so on between states merely expedient arrangements which can and will be set aside if they conflict with the vital interests of states. There are no international obligations in the moral sense of the word—i.e. bonds of mutual duty—between independent states. As indicated above, the only fundamental responsibility of statespeople is to advance and to defend the national interest. That is nowhere stated more brutally than by Machiavelli in his famous book *The Prince* (see Box 3.3).

That means that there can be no progressive change in world politics comparable to the developments that characterize domestic political life. That also means that realist IR theory is considered to be valid not only at particular times but at all times, because the foregoing basic facts of world politics never change. That, at any rate, is what most realists argue and evidently believe.

There is an important distinction in realist IR theory between classical realism and contemporary realism. Classical realism is one of the 'traditional' approaches to IR that was prominent prior to the behaviouralist revolution of the 1950s and 1960s as outlined in Chapter 2. It is basically normative in approach, and focuses on the core political values of national security and state survival. Classical realists have lived in many different historical periods, from ancient Greece right down to the present time. Contemporary realism, on the other hand and as the name implies, is a recent IR doctrine: it is basically scientific in approach and focuses on the international system or structure. It is largely (although not exclusively) American in origin. Indeed, it has been and perhaps still is the most prominent IR theory in the United States, which is home to by far the largest number of IR scholars in the world. That fact alone makes contemporary realism a particularly important IR theory.

**Classical Realism**

What is classical realism? Who are the leading classical realists? What are their key ideas and arguments? In this section we shall examine, briefly, the international thought of three outstanding classical realists of the past: (1) the ancient Greek historian Thucydides; (2) the Renaissance Italian political theorist Niccolo Machiavelli; and (3) the seventeenth-century
English political and legal philosopher Thomas Hobbes. In the next section we shall single out for special treatment the neoclassical realist thought of the twentieth-century German-American IR theorist Hans J. Morgenthau.

**Thucydides**

What we call international relations Thucydides saw as the inevitable competitions and conflicts between ancient Greek city-states (which together composed the cultural-linguistic civilization known as Hellas) and between Hellas and neighbouring non-Greek empires, such as Macedonia or Persia (see web links 3.03 and 3.04). Neither the states of Hellas nor their non-Greek neighbours were in any sense equal. On the contrary, they were substantially unequal: there were a few 'great powers'—such as Athens, Sparta and the Persian Empire, and many smaller and lesser powers—such as the tiny island statelets of the Aegean Sea. That inequality was considered to be inevitable and natural. A distinctive feature of Thucydides' brand of realism is thus its naturalist character. Aristotle said that 'man is a political animal'. Thucydides said in effect that political animals are highly unequal in their powers and capabilities to dominate others and to defend themselves. All states, large and small, must adapt to that given reality of unequal power and conduct themselves accordingly. If states do that, they will survive and perhaps even prosper. If states fail to do that, they will place themselves in jeopardy and may even be destroyed. Ancient history is full of many examples of states and empires, small and large, that were destroyed.

So Thucydides emphasizes the limited choices and the restricted sphere of manoeuvre available to statespeople in the conduct of foreign policy. He also emphasizes that decisions have consequences: before any final decision is made a decision-maker should have carefully thought through the likely consequences, bad as well as good. In pointing that out, Thucydides is also emphasizing the ethics of caution and prudence in the conduct of foreign policy in an international world of great inequality, of restricted foreign-policy choices, and of ever-present danger as well as opportunity. Foresight, prudence, caution and judgement are the characteristic political ethics of classical realism which Thucydides and most other classical realists are at pains to distinguish from private morality and the principle of justice.

**Thucydides on the strong and the weak**

The standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept...this is the safe rule—to stand up to one’s equals, to behave with deference to one’s superiors, and to treat one’s inferiors with moderation. Think it over again, then, when we have withdrawn from the meeting, and let this be a point that constantly recurs to your minds—that you are discussing the fate of your country, that you have only one country, and that its future for good or ill depends on this one single decision which you are going to make.

Thucydides (1972: 406)

If a country and its government wish to survive and prosper, they had better pay attention to these fundamental political maxims of international relations.

In his famous study of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) Thucydides (1972: 407) put his realist philosophy into the mouths of the leaders of Athens—a great power—in their dialogue with the leaders of Melos—a minor power—during a moment of conflict between the two city-states in 416 BC. The Melians made an appeal to the principle of justice, which to them meant that their honour and dignity as an independent state should be respected by the powerful Athenians. But, according to Thucydides, justice is of a special kind in international relations. It is not about equal treatment for all; it is about knowing your proper place, about adapting to the natural reality of unequal power. Thucydides therefore let the Athenians reply to the Melian appeal as set out in Box 3.2.

That is probably the most famous example of the classical realist understanding of international relations as basically an anarchy of separate states that have no real choice except to operate according to the principles and practices of power politics in which security and survival are the primary values and war is the final arbiter.

**Machiavelli**

Power (the Lion) and deception (the Fox) are the two essential means for the conduct of foreign policy, according to the political teachings of Machiavelli (1984: 66). The supreme political value is national freedom, i.e. independence. The main responsibility of rulers is always to seek the advantages and to defend the interests of their state and thus ensure its survival. That requires strength: if a state is not strong it will be a standing invitation for others to prey upon it; the ruler must be a lion. That also requires cunning and—if necessary—ruthlessness in the pursuit of self-interest: the ruler must also be a fox. If rulers are not astute, crafty and adroit they might miss an opportunity that could bring great advantages or benefits to them and their state. Even more importantly, they might fail to notice a menace or threat which if not guarded against might harm or even destroy them, their regime and possibly even the state as well. That statesmen and stateswomen must be both lions and foxes is at the heart of Machiavelli's (1984: 66) realist theory. Classical realist IR theory is primarily a theory of survival (Wight 1966).
The overriding Machiavellian assumption is that the world is a dangerous place (see web link 3.05). But it is also, by the same token, an opportune place too. If anybody hopes to survive in such a world, he or she must always be aware of dangers, must anticipate them and to bask in the reflected glory of their accumulated power and wealth, it is necessary for them to recognize and to exploit the opportunities that present themselves and to do that more quickly, more skilfully and—if necessary—more ruthlessly than any 'Machiavellian' activity based on the intelligent calculation of one's power and interests against the power and interests of rivals and competitors.

That shrewd outlook is reflected in some typical Machiavellian maxims of realist statecraft, including the following. Be aware of what is happening. Do not wait for things to happen. Anticipate the motives and actions of others. Do not wait for others to act. Act before they do. The prudent state leader acts to ward off any threat posed by his or her neighbours. He or she should be prepared to engage in preemptive war and similar initiatives. The realist state leader is alert to opportunities in any political situation, and is prepared and equipped to exploit them.

Above all, according to Machiavelli, the responsible state leader must not operate in accordance with the principles of Christian ethics: love thy neighbour, be peaceful, and avoid war except in self-defence or in pursuit of a just cause; be charitable, share your wealth with others, always act in good faith, etc. Machiavelli sees these moral maxims as the height of political irresponsibility: if political leaders act in accordance with Christian virtues, they are bound to come to grief and they will lose everything. Not only that: they will sacrifice the property and perhaps the freedom and even the lives of their citizens, who depend upon their statecraft. The implication is clear: if a ruler does not know or respect the maxims of power politics, his or her statecraft will fail, and with it the security and welfare of the citizens who depend absolutely upon it. In other words, political responsibility flows to escape from those intolerable circumstances at the earliest moment if that is possible (see web link 3.06).

Hobbes believes that there is an escape route from the state of nature into a civilized human condition, and that is via the creation and maintenance of a sovereign state. The means of escape is by men and women turning their fear of each other into a joint collaboration with each other to form a security pact that can guarantee each other's safety. Men and women paradoxically cooperate politically because of their fear of being hurt or killed by their neighbours: they are 'civilized by fear of death' (Oakeshott 1975: 36). Their mutual fear and insecurity drives them away from their natural condition: the war of all against all. In other words, they are basically driven to institute a sovereign state not by their reason (intelligence) but, rather, by their passion (emotion). With the value of peace and order firmly in mind, they willingly and jointly collaborate to create a state with a sovereign government that possesses absolute authority and credible power to protect them from both internal disorders and foreign enemies and threats. In the civil condition—i.e. of peace and order—under the protection of the state men and women have an opportunity to flourish in relative safety: they no longer live under the constant threat of injury and death.

**Hobbes on the state of nature**

In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building ... no arts; no letters; no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Hobbes (1946: 82)
secure and at peace, they are now free to prosper. As Hobbes puts it, they can pursue and enjoy 'felicity', i.e. happiness, well-being.

However, that statist solution to the problem of the natural condition of humankind automatically poses a serious political problem. The very act of instituting a sovereign state to escape from the fearful state of nature simultaneously creates another state of nature between states. That poses what is usually referred to as 'the security dilemma' in world politics: the achievement of personal security and domestic security through the creation of a state is necessarily accompanied by the condition of national and international insecurity that is rooted in the anarchy of the state system.

There is no escape from the international security dilemma in the way that there is an escape from the personal security dilemma, because there is no possibility of forming a global state or world government. Unlike individual men and women in the primary state of nature, sovereign states are not willing to give up their independence for the sake of any global security guarantee. That is because the international state of nature between states is not as threatening and dangerous as the original state of nature: it is easier for states to provide security than it is for individual men and women to do it on their own; states can mobilize the collective power of large numbers of people; states can arm themselves and defend themselves against foreign-security threats in a credible and continuous way. Individual men and women are vulnerable because they sometimes have to let their guard down: e.g. they have to sleep. But states never sleep: while some citizens sleep, other citizens are awake and on guard. If states do their job of protecting their own people, then the international state of nature can even be seen as a good thing because it gives particular groups of people freedom from other groups of people. In other words, international anarchy based on sovereign states is a system of freedom for groups. But the main point about the international state of nature is that it is a condition of actual or potential war; there can be no permanent or guaranteed peace between sovereign states. War is necessary, as a last resort, for resolving disputes between states that cannot agree and will not acquiesce.

According to Hobbes, states can also contract treaties with each other to provide a legal basis for their relations: international law can moderate the international state of nature by providing a framework of agreements and rules that are of advantage to all states. The classical realism of Hobbes thus emphasizes both military power and international law. But international law is created by states, and it will only be observed if it is in the security and survival interests of states to do that; otherwise it will be ignored. For Hobbes, as for Machiavelli and Thucydides, security and survival are values of fundamental importance. But the core value of Hobbesian realism is domestic peace—peace within the framework of the sovereign state—and the opportunity that only civil peace can provide for men and women to enjoy felicity. The state is organized and equipped for war in order to provide domestic peace for its subjects and citizens.

We can summarize the discussion thus far by briefly stating what these classical realists basically have in common. First, they agree that the human condition is a condition of insecurity and conflict which must be addressed and dealt with. Second, they agree that there is a body of political knowledge, or wisdom, to deal with the problem of security, and each of them tries to identify the keys to it. Finally, they agree that there is no final escape from this human condition, which is a permanent feature of human life. In other words, although there is a body of political wisdom—which can be identified and stated in the form of political maxims—there are no permanent or final solutions to the problems of politics—including international politics. This sober and somewhat pessimistic view is at the heart of the IR theory of the leading neoclassical realist of the twentieth century, Hans J. Morgenthau.

### Morgenthau's Neoclassical Realism

According to Morgenthau (1965), men and women are by nature political animals: they are born to pursue power and to enjoy the fruits of power. Morgenthau speaks of the animus dominandi, the human 'lust' for power (Morgenthau 1965: 192). The craving for power dictates a search not only for relative advantage but also for a secure political space within which to maintain oneself and to enjoy oneself free from the political dictates of others. That is the security aspect of the animus dominandi. The ultimate political space within which security can be arranged and enjoyed is, of course, the independent state. Security beyond the state is impossible (see web links 3.07 and 3.08).

The human animus dominandi inevitably brings men and women into conflict with each other. That creates the condition of power politics which is at the heart not only of Morgenthau's realism but of all classical and neoclassical realist conceptions of international relations. 'Politics is a struggle for power over men, and whatever its ultimate aim may be, power is its immediate goal and the modes of acquiring, maintaining, and demonstrating it determine the technique of political action' (Morgenthau 1965: 195). Here Morgenthau is clearly echoing Machiavelli and Hobbes. If people desire to enjoy a political space free from the intervention or control of foreigners, they will have to mobilize their power and deploy their power for that purpose. That is, they will have to organize themselves into a capable and effective state by means of which they can defend their interests. The system of states leads to international anarchy and conflict.

The struggle between states in turn leads to the problem of justifying power in human relations. Here we arrive at the central normative doctrine of classical and neoclassical realism. Morgenthau follows in the tradition of Thucydides and Machiavelli: there is one...
morbidity for the private sphere and another very different morality for the public sphere. Political ethics allows some actions that would not be tolerated by private morality. Morgenthau is critical of those theorists and practitioners, such as American President Woodrow Wilson, who believed that it was necessary for political ethics to be brought into line with private ethics. For example, in a famous address to the US Congress in 1917, President Wilson said he could discern 'the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states' (Morgenthau 1965: 180).

Morgenthau considers that outlook to be not only ill-advised but also irresponsible: it is not only mistaken intellectually but also fundamentally wrong morally. It is a gross intellectual mistake because it fails to appreciate the important difference between the public sphere of politics, on the one hand, and the private sphere or domestic life, on the other hand. According to classical realists, the difference is fundamental. As indicated, Machiavelli made that point by noting that if a ruler operated in accordance with Christian private ethics he or she would come to grief very quickly because political rivals could not be counted on to operate in the same Christian way. It would thus be an ill-advised and irresponsible foreign policy; and all the people who depended on the policy would suffer from the disaster it created.

Such a policy would be reckless in the extreme, and would thus constitute a moral failure because political leaders bear a very heavy responsibility for the security and welfare of their country and its people. They are not supposed to expose their people to unnecessary perils or hardships. Sometimes—for example, during crises or emergencies—it may be necessary to carry out foreign policies and engage in international activities that would clearly be wrong according to private morality: spying, lying, cheating, stealing, conspiring and so on are only a few of the many activities that would be considered at best dubious and at worst evil by the standards of private morality. Sometimes it may be necessary to trample on human rights for the sake of the national interest: during war, for example. Sometimes it may be necessary to sacrifice a lesser good for a greater good and to choose between evils: for realists that tragic situation is virtually a defining feature of international politics, especially during times of war. Here Morgenthau is reiterating an insight into the ethically compromised nature of statecraft that was noted by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (1974: 82, 121), who spoke of the 'noble lie': 'Our rulers will probably have to make considerable use of lies and deceit for a greater good and to choose between evils: for realists that tragic situation is virtually a defining feature of international politics, especially during times of war. Here Morgenthau is reiterating an insight into the ethically compromised nature of statecraft.

**Morgenthau on political morality**

Realism maintains 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. The individual may say for himself: 'fiat justitia, pereat mundus (let justice be done even if the world perishes)', but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care.

Morgenthau (1985: 12)

**President Nixon on the balance of power (1970)**

We must remember the only time in the history of the world that we have had any extended periods of peace is when there has been balance of power. It is when one nation becomes infinitely more powerful in relation to its potential competitor that the danger of war arises. So I believe in a world in which the United States is powerful. I think it will be a safer world and a better world if we have a strong, healthy United States, Europe, Soviet Union, China, Japan, each balancing the other, not playing one against the other, an even balance.

Quoted in Kissinger (1994: 705)

**President Nixon on the American national interest (1970)**

Our objective ... is to support our interests over the long run with a sound foreign policy. The more that policy is based on a realistic assessment of our and others' interests, the more effective our role in the world can be. We are not involved in the world because we have commitments; we have commitments because we are involved. Our interests must shape our commitments, rather than the other way around.

Quoted in Kissinger (1994: 711-12)
Morgenthau (1985: 4–17) encapsulates his IR theory in 'six principles of political realism'. As a conclusion to this section of the chapter we shall briefly reiterate them.

- Politics is rooted in a permanent and unchanging human nature which is basically self-centred, self-regarding and self-interested.
- Politics is 'an autonomous sphere of action' and cannot therefore be reduced to economics (as Marxist scholars are prone to do) or reduced to morals (as Kantian or liberal theorists are prone to do). State leaders should act in accordance with the dictates of political wisdom.
- Self-interest is a basic fact of the human condition: all people have an interest at a minimum in their own security and survival. Politics is the arena for the expression of those interests which are bound to come into conflict sooner or later. International politics is an arena of conflicting state interests. But interests are not fixed: the world is in flux and interests change over time and over space. Realism is a doctrine that responds to the fact of a changing political reality.
- The ethics of international relations is a political or situational ethics which is very different from private morality. A political leader does not have the same freedom to do the right thing that a private citizen has. That is because a political leader has far heavier responsibilities than a private citizen: the leader is responsible to the people (typically of his or her country) who depend on him or her; the leader is responsible for their security and welfare. The responsible state leader should strive not to do the best but, rather, to do the best that circumstances on that particular day permit. That circumscribed situation of political choice is the normative heart of realist ethics.
- Realists are therefore opposed to the idea that particular nations—even great democratic nations such as the United States—can impose their ideologies on other nations and can employ their power in crusades to do that. Realists oppose that because they see it as a dangerous activity that threatens international peace and security. Ultimately, it could backfire and threaten the crusading country.
- Statecraft is a sober and uninspiring activity that involves a profound awareness of human limitations and human imperfections. That pessimistic knowledge of human beings as they are and not as we might wish them to be is a difficult truth that lies at the heart of international politics.

**Box 3.10** Morgenthau's concept of neoclassical realist statecraft

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HUMAN NATURE (basic condition)</th>
<th>POLITICAL SITUATION (means and context)</th>
<th>POLITICAL CONDUCT (goals and values)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Animus dominandi</td>
<td>* Power politics</td>
<td>* Political ethics (prudence, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Self-interest</td>
<td>* Political power</td>
<td>* Human necessities (security, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Political circumstances</td>
<td>* National interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Political skills</td>
<td>* Balance of power</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Schelling and Strategic Realism**

Classical and neoclassical realists—including Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Morgenthau—provide a normative analysis as well as an empirical analysis of IR. Power is understood to be not only a fact of political life but also a matter of political responsibility. Indeed, power and responsibility are inseparable concepts. For example, the balance of power is not merely an empirical statement about the way that world politics are alleged to operate. The balance of power is also a basic value: it is a legitimate goal and a guide to responsible statecraft on the part of the leaders of the great powers. In other words, for classical realists the balance of power is a desirable institution and a good thing to strive for because it prevents hegemonic world domination by any one great power. It upholds the basic values of international peace and security.

Since the 1950s and 1960s new realist approaches have emerged which are a product of the behaviouralist revolution and the quest for a positivist social science of IR. Many contemporary realists seek to provide an empirical analysis of world politics. But they hold back from providing a normative analysis of world politics because that is deemed to be subjective and thus unscientific. That attitude to the study of values in world politics marks a fundamental divide between classical and neoclassical realists on the one hand and contemporary strategic realists and neorealists on the other. In this section we shall examine strategic realism which is exemplified by the thought of Thomas Schelling (1980; 1996). Schelling does not pay much attention to the normative aspects of realism, although he does notice their presence in the background. In the next section we shall turn to neorealism which is associated most closely with Kenneth Waltz (1979). Waltz tends to ignore the normative aspects of realism.

Strategic realism focuses centrally on foreign policy decision-making. When state leaders confront basic diplomatic and military issues they are obliged to think strategically—i.e. instrumentally—if they hope to be successful. Schelling (1980; 1996) seeks to provide analytical tools for strategic thought. He views diplomacy and foreign policy, especially that of the great powers and particularly the United States, as a rational-instrumental activity that can be more deeply understood by the application of a form of logical analysis called 'game theory' (see web links 3.09 and 3.10). He summarizes his thought as shown in Box 3.10.

A central concept that Schelling employs is that of a 'threat': his analysis concerns how statespeople can deal rationally with the threat and dangers of nuclear war. For example, writing about nuclear deterrence Schelling (1980: 6–7) makes the important observation that the efficacy of... [a nuclear] threat may depend on what alternatives are available to the potential enemy, who, if he is not to react like a trapped lion, must be left some tolerable recourse. We have come to realize that a threat of all-out retaliation... eliminates lesser courses of action and forces him to choose between extremes... [and] may induce him to strike first.
This is a good example of strategic realism which basically concerns how to employ power intelligently in order to get our military adversary to do what we desire and, more importantly, to avoid doing what we fear. The statement from President Kennedy in 1963 (Box 3.11) gives an example of the need for bargaining between strongly armed nuclear powers.

For Schelling the activity of foreign policy is technically instrumental and thus free from moral choice. It is not primarily concerned about what is good or what is right. It is primarily concerned with the question: what is required for our policy to be successful? These questions are clearly similar to those posed above by Machiavelli. Schelling (1980) identifies and dissects with sharp insight various mechanisms, stratagems and moves which, if followed by the principal actors, could generate collaboration and avoid disaster in a conflict-ridden world of nuclear-armed states. But Schelling does not base his instrumental analysis on an underlying political or civic ethics the way that Machiavelli does. The normative values at stake in foreign policy are largely taken for granted. That marks an important divide between classical and neoclassical realism, on the one hand, and contemporary strategic realism and neorealism, on the other.

One of the crucial instruments of foreign policy for a great power, like the United States, is that of armed force. And one of the characteristic concerns of strategic realism is the use of armed force in foreign policy. Schelling devotes considerable thought to this issue. He observes (1996: 169–70) that there is an important distinction between brute force and coercion: 'between taking what you want and making someone give it to you'. He goes on to notice that 'brute force succeeds when it is used, whereas the power to hurt is most successful when held in reserve. It is the threat of damage . . . that can make someone yield or comply.' He adds that to make the use of our coercive apparatus effective 'we need to know what an adversary treasures and what scares him[sic]', and we also need to communicate clearly to him 'what will cause the violence to be inflicted [on him] and what will cause it to be withheld'.

Schelling goes on to make a fundamentally realist point: for coercion to be effective as a foreign policy 'requires that our interests and our opponent's [interests] are not absolutely opposed . . . coercion requires finding a bargain'. Coercion is a method of bringing an adversary into a bargaining relationship and getting the adversary to do what we want him or her to do without having to compel it—i.e. the use of brute force, which is usually far more difficult, far less efficient and far more dangerous (see web links 3.11 and 3.12). Schelling (1996: 181) summarizes his analysis of the modern diplomacy of violence in Box 3.12.

There obviously are striking similarities between the realism of Machiavelli and that of Schelling. However, unlike Machiavelli the strategic realism of Schelling (1980) usually does not probe the ethics of foreign policy: it merely presupposes basic foreign goals without comment. The normative aspects of foreign policy and the justifications of intelligent strategy in a dangerous world of nuclear-armed superpowers are intimated by his argument but largely hidden beneath the surface of his text. Schelling speaks quite readily of the 'dirty' and 'extortionate' heart of strategic realism. But he does not inquire why that kind of diplomacy could be called 'dirty' or 'extortionate', and he does not say whether that can be justified. Schelling's realism is fundamentally different from Machiavelli's realism in that important respect.
Strategic realism thus presupposes values and carries normative implications. Unlike classical realism, however, it does not examine them or explore them. For example, Schelling (1980: 4) is well aware that rational behaviour is motivated not only by a conscious calculation of advantages but also by ‘an explicit and internally consistent value system’. But the role of value systems is not explicitly investigated by Schelling beyond making it clear that behaviour is related to values, such as vital national interests. The character and modus operandi of the specific values involved in nuclear strategy—threats, mutual distrust, promises, reprisals and so forth—are not investigated. Values are taken as given and treated instrumentally. In other words, the fundamental point of behaving the way that Schelling suggests foreign policymakers ought to behave is not explored, clarified or even addressed. He provides a strategic analysis but not a normative theory of IR. That is a characteristic of much contemporary realism in IR.

Here we come to a fundamental difference between classical or neoclassical realism and contemporary realism. Here is where Schelling differs fundamentally from Machiavelli. For Machiavelli, the point was the survival and flourishing of the nation. It was the responsibility of state leaders to achieve that desirable political condition which required civic (i.e. political) virtue on their part. Classical realists are conscious of the basic values at stake in world politics and they are explicitly concerned about them: they provide a political and ethical theory of IR. Contemporary realists are mostly silent about them and seem to take them more or less for granted without commenting on them or building them into their realist IR theories. They limit their analyses to political structures and processes and they largely ignore political ends. That is evident from a brief analysis of contemporary neorealism.

**Waltz and Neorealism**

The leading contemporary neorealist thinker is undoubtedly Kenneth Waltz (1979). He takes some elements of classical and neoclassical realism as a starting-point—e.g. independent states existing and operating in a system of international anarchy. But he departs from that tradition by ignoring its normative concerns and by trying to provide a scientific IR theory (see web link 3.14). Unlike Morgenthau (1985), he gives no account of human nature and he ignores the ethics of statecraft. Waltz’s Theory of International Politics (1979) seeks to provide a scientific explanation of the international political system. His explanatory approach is heavily influenced by positivist models of economics. A scientific theory of IR leads us to expect states to behave in certain predictable ways. In Waltz’s view the best IR theory is a neorealist systems theory that focuses centrally on the structure of the system, on its interacting units, and on the continuities and changes of the system. In classical realism, state leaders and their subjective valuations of international relations are at the centre of attention. In neorealism, by contrast, the structure of the system, in particular the relative distribution of power, is the central analytical focus. Actors are less important because structures compel them to act in certain ways. Structures more or less determine actions.

According to Waltz’s neorealist theory, a basic feature of international relations is the decentralized structure of anarchy between states. States are alike in all basic functional respects—i.e. in spite of their different cultures or ideologies or constitutions or personnel, they all perform the same basic tasks. All states have to collect taxes, conduct foreign policy and so on. States differ significantly only in regard to their greatly varying capabilities. In Waltz’s own words, the state units of an international system are ‘distinguished primarily by their greater or lesser capabilities for performing similar tasks . . . the structure of a system
changes with changes in the distribution of capabilities across the system's units' (Waltz 1979: 97). In other words, international change occurs when great powers rise and fall and the balance of power shifts accordingly. A typical means of such change is great-power war.

As indicated, the states that are crucially important for determining changes in the structure of the international system are the great powers. A balance of power between states can be achieved, but war is always a possibility in an anarchical system. Waltz distinguishes between bipolar systems—such as existed during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union—and multipolar systems—such as existed both before and after the Cold War. Waltz believes that bipolar systems are more stable and thus provide a better guarantee of peace and security than multipolar systems. 'With only two great powers, both can be expected to act to maintain the system' (Waltz 1979: 204). That is because in maintaining the system they are maintaining themselves. According to that view, the Cold War was a period of international stability and peace.

That hypothesis may be historically problematical insofar as the United States and the Soviet Union took joint (i.e. cooperative) actions in the early 1990s to terminate their international military rivalry and thus to bring the bipolar system and the Cold War to an end. In the course of that historical change the Soviet Union failed to survive and a number of smaller successor states emerged in its place, the most important of which is Russia. In the light of the ending of the Cold War, presumably, Waltzian neorealism will have to be revised to incorporate the historical possibility that two great powers may in certain circumstances terminate a bipolar system rather than perpetuate it without engaging in a war in which one of them is defeated. It is a matter of debate among IR scholars whether the United States defeated the Soviet Union in the Cold War or the Soviet government, particularly President Gorbachev, terminated it by withdrawing from the contest. Neorealists are inclined to take the first view.

As indicated, Waltz takes classical and neoclassical realism as a starting-point and develops some of its core ideas and assumptions. For example, he employs the concept of international anarchy and focuses exclusively on states. He also focuses on the central feature of anarchical state systems: power politics. He assumes that the fundamental concern of states is security and survival. He also assumes that the major problem of great-power conflict is war, and that the major task of international relations among the great powers is that of peace and security.

But Waltz departs from classical and neoclassical realism in some fundamental ways which make his approach different from that, say, of Morgenthau. There is no discussion of human nature, such as Morgenthau provides and even Schelling clearly assumes. The focus is on the structure of the system and not on the human beings who create the system or operate the system. State leaders are prisoners of the structure of the state system and its determinist logic which dictates what they must do in their conduct of foreign policy. There is no room in Waltz's theory for foreign policymaking that is independent of the structure of the system. Thus, in the above example, neorealists would view Gorbachev's policy of disengaging from the Cold War as dictated by the Soviet Union's 'defeat' at the hands of the United States. On that view, Gorbachev could not have initiated the policy for domestic reasons or for ideological reasons. Waltz's image of the role of state leaders in conducting foreign policy comes close to being a mechanical image in which their choices are shaped by the international structural constraints that they face, as emphasized in Box 3.15.

Unlike Schelling's strategic realism, Waltz's neorealist approach does not provide explicit policy guidance to state leaders as they confront the practical problems of world politics. That is presumably because they have little or no choice, owing to the confining international structure in which they must operate. Waltz (1979: 194–210) does address the question of 'the management of international affairs'. However, that discussion is far more about the structural constraints of foreign policy than it is about what Schelling clearly understands as the logic and art of foreign policy. Schelling operates with a notion of situated choice: the rational choice for the situation or circumstances in which leaders find themselves. The choice may be sharply confined by the circumstances but it is a choice nevertheless and it may be made intelligently or stupidly, skillfully or maladroitly, etc. The main point of Schelling's analysis is to reveal the logic and art of making rational foreign policy choices. Waltz's neorealism makes far less provision for statecraft and diplomacy than Schelling's strategic realism. Waltz's argument is at base a determinist theory in which structure dictates policy. This takes the classical realist idea of the importance of international structure in foreign policy to a point beyond classical or neoclassical realism, which always makes provision for the politics and ethics of statecraft (Morgenthau 1989).

However, just beneath the surface of Waltz's neorealist text, and occasionally on the surface, there is a recognition of the ethical dimension of international politics which is virtually identical to classical realist IR. The core concepts that Waltz employs have a normative aspect. For example, he operates with a concept of state sovereignty: 'To say that a state is sovereign means that it decides for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems' (Waltz 1979: 96). Thus state sovereignty means being in a position to decide, a condition which is usually signified by the term 'independence': sovereign states are postulated as
independent of other sovereign states. But what is independence? Waltz (1979: 88) says that each state is formally 'the equal of all the others. None is entitled to command; none is required to obey.' But to say that independence is an 'entitlement' is to take notice of a norm which is acknowledged: in this case the norm of 'equal' state sovereignty. Because to say that states are the formal or legal equals of each other is to make not only an empirical statement but also a normative statement. For Waltz, all states are equal only in a formal-legal sense; they are unequal, often profoundly so, in a substantive or material sense. But that means that a norm of state equality exists which all states without exception are expected to observe in their relations with each other regardless of their substantive inequalities of power. Waltz also assumes that states are worth fighting for. That, too, indicates that neorealism is imbued with normative values: those of state security and survival.

Waltz (1979: 113) operates, as well, with a concept of the national interest: 'each state plots the course it thinks will best serve its interests'. For classical realists the national interest is the basic guide of responsible foreign policy: it is a moral idea that must be defended and promoted by state leaders. For Waltz, however, the national interest seems to operate like an automatic signal commanding state leaders when and where to move. The difference here is: Morgenthau believes that state leaders are duty bound to conduct their foreign policies by reference to the guidelines laid down by the national interest, and they may be condemned for failing to do that. Waltz's neorealist theory hypothesizes that they will always do that more or less automatically. Morgenthau thus sees states as organizations guided by leaders whose foreign policies are successful or unsuccessful, depending on the astuteness and wisdom of their decisions. Waltz sees states as structures that respond to the impersonal constraints and dictates of the international system.

Similarly, Waltz (1979: 195) argues that the great powers manage the international system. Classical and neoclassical realists argue that they ought to manage that system and that they can be criticized when they fail to manage it properly—i.e. when they fail to maintain international order. The notion that the Great Powers must be Great Responsibilities is not only a traditional realist idea; it is also a core idea of the International Society tradition (see Chapter 5). Great powers are understood by Waltz to have 'a big stake in their system' and for them management of the system is not only something that is possible but also something that is 'worthwhile'. It is perfectly clear that Waltz values international order. It is clear, too, that he is convinced that international order is more likely to be achieved in bipolar systems than in multipolar systems. That discloses his normative values. The difference between neorealism and classical and neoclassical realism in this regard is that Waltz takes it as a given that that will happen, whereas Morgenthau and classical realists take it as an important norm for judging the foreign policy of the great powers.

A distinctive characteristic of neorealism emerges at this point. Waltz wants to present a scientific explanation of international politics; but he cannot avoid employing what are inherently normative concepts, and he cannot avoid making what are implicitly normative assumptions and indeed resting his entire case on normative foundations of a traditional realist kind. Thus, although he makes no explicit reference to values or ethics and avoids normative theory, the basic assumptions and concepts he uses and the basic international issues he is concerned with are normative ones. In that respect his neorealism is not as far removed from classical or neoclassical realism as his claims about scientific theory imply. This demonstrates how attempts at scientific explanation can frequently rest on unidentified norms and values (see Chapter 9).

### Neorealist Stability Theory

Both strategic realism (Schelling 1980; 1996) and neorealism (Waltz 1979) were intimately connected with the Cold War. They were distinctive IR theory responses to that special, if not unique, historical situation. Being strongly influenced by the behaviouralist revolution in IR (see Chapters 2 and 8) they both sought to apply scientific methods to the theoretical and practical problems posed by the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Schelling tried to show how a notion of strategy based on game theory could shed light on the nuclear rivalry between the two superpowers. Waltz tried to show how a structural analysis could shed light on 'the long peace' (Gaddis 1987) that was produced by the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War (see web link 3.15). The end of the Cold War thus raises an important question about the future of realist theories that were developed during what could be regarded as an exceptional period of modern international history. In this section we shall address that question in connection with neorealism.

In a widely discussed essay John Mearsheimer (1993) takes up the neorealist argument of Waltz (1979) and applies it to both the past and the future. He says that neorealism has continued relevance for explaining international relations: neorealism is a general theory that applies to other historical situations besides that of the Cold War. He also argues that neorealism can be employed to predict the course of international history beyond the Cold War.

Mearsheimer builds on Waltz's (1979: 161–93) argument (outlined in the previous section) concerning the stability of bipolar systems as compared with multipolar systems (see web link 3.18). These two configurations are considered to be the main structural arrangements of power that are possible among independent states. As indicated, Waltz claims that bipolar systems are superior to multipolar systems because they provide greater international stability and thus greater peace and security. There are three basic reasons why bipolar systems are more stable and peaceful. First, the number of great-power conflicts is fewer, and that reduces the possibilities of great-power war. Second, it is easier to operate an effective system of deterrence because fewer great powers are involved. Finally, because only two powers dominate the system the chances of miscalculation and misadventure are lower. There are fewer fingers on the trigger. In short, the two rival superpowers can keep their eye steadily fixed on each other without the distraction and confusion that would occur if there were a larger number of great powers, as was the case prior to 1945 and arguably has been the case since 1990 (Mearsheimer 1993: 149–50).

The question Mearsheimer (1993: 141) poses is: what would happen if the bipolar system were replaced by a multipolar system? How would that basic system change affect the chances
for peace and the dangers of war in post-Cold War Europe? The answer Mearsheimer (p. 142) gives is as follows:

the prospects for major crises and war in Europe are likely to increase markedly if ... this scenario unfolds. The next decades in a Europe without the superpowers would probably not be as violent as the first 45 years of this century, but would probably be substantially more prone to violence than the past 45 years.

What is the basis for that pessimistic conclusion? Mearsheimer (pp. 142–3) argues that the distribution and nature of military power are the main sources of war and peace and says, specifically, that 'the long peace' between 1945 and 1990 was a result of three fundamentally important conditions: the bipolar system of military power in Europe; the approximate military equality between the United States and the Soviet Union; and the reality that both of the rival superpowers were equipped with an imposing arsenal of nuclear weapons. The withdrawal of the superpowers from the European heartland would give rise to a multipolar system consisting of five major powers (Germany, France, Britain, Russia and perhaps Italy) as well as a number of minor powers. That system would be 'prone to instability'. The departure of the superpowers would also remove the large nuclear arsenals they now maintain in Central Europe. This would remove the pacifying effect that these weapons have had on European politics' (Mearsheimer 1993: 143).

Thus, according to Mearsheimer (p. 187), the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union was principally responsible for transforming a historically violent region into a very peaceful place. Mearsheimer even argues that the demise of the bipolar Cold War order and the emergence of a multipolar Europe will produce a highly undesirable return to the bad old ways of European anarchy and instability and even a renewed danger of international conflict, crises and possibly war. He makes the following highly controversial point:

The West has an interest in maintaining peace in Europe. It therefore has an interest in maintaining the Cold War order, and hence has an interest in the continuation of the Cold War confrontation; developments that threaten to end it are dangerous.

By way of conclusion, we should notice some contemporary historical places where Mearsheimer's thesis seems to be confirmed by events, and other places where it seems to be refuted by them. His hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the outbreak of conflict and war in the former Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo in Serbia) and in the former Soviet Union (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Russia itself—in Chechnya).

It is worth pointing out, however, that these places are outside the Central European heartland where the neo-realist thesis about the instability of the post-Cold War era is meant to apply most. In that part of Europe since the late 1950s something entirely different has been happening that may raise questions about Mearsheimer's neo-realist hypothesis: the integration of the European nation-states into the European Union, the core of which consists of Germany and France, who have created a close partnership over the past several decades. The end of the Cold War has not put an end to that relationship; if anything, it made it more important. In other words, the European Union and particularly its

Franco-German core discloses a new international relationship between the major and minor powers of Europe that neorealism's thesis about bipolarism versus multipolarism faces some difficulties in comprehending.

Mearsheimer's arguments raise the important question of how realists should understand the post-Cold War era. There have been two major debates that offer insights into how realism looks upon international relations and particularly the relations of the great powers after the Cold War. The first debate was over the expansion of NATO to include East European countries, most of which were former members of the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact that ceased to exist after the end of the Cold War. The second debate concerned the paramount place of the United States in the international system and whether that would provoke a new balance of power by other states against American domination. These issues are discussed in the next two sections.

**Realism after the Cold War: The Issue of NATO Expansion**

In 1995, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization conducted a study on the pros and cons of NATO enlargement via expansion into Eastern Europe (http://www.nato.int/issues/enlargement/index.html). It concluded that the end of the Cold War provided a unique opportunity to improve security and stability for the entire Euro-Atlantic area and not merely Western Europe and North America. The study further concluded that enlargement would reinforce democratic reforms in Eastern Europe, not least by establishing 'civilian and democratic control over military forces', by fostering 'patterns and habits of cooperation, consultation and consensus-building relations' among newcomers and older members of the alliance, and by 'promoting good-neighbourly relations'. It would also increase 'transparency in defence planning and military budgets', thereby reinforcing confidence among states, and 'would reinforce the overall tendency toward closer integration and cooperation in Europe'. The study concluded that enlargement would strengthen the alliance's ability
to contribute to European and international security and strengthen and broaden the transatlantic partnership.

From the time the alliance was created in 1949, NATO's membership has expanded from twelve founding members to twenty-six members in 2005. The twelve founders are Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States. The first round of enlargement took place in 1952 with the admission of Greece and Turkey, thereby extending NATO to South-eastern Europe. Three years later, in 1955, the Federal Republic of Germany became NATO's fifteenth member. Spain became the sixteenth member when it joined in 1982. None of that expansion was controversial, because it was seen to strengthen NATO in its effort to confront and contain the Soviet Union and the Soviet-organized Warsaw Pact (see web link 3.19).

The end of the Cold War saw new rounds of expansion into Eastern Europe. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were invited to begin accession talks at the Alliance's Madrid Summit in 1997 and on 12 March 1999 they became the first former members of the Warsaw Pact to join NATO. Enlargement remains an on-going process, based upon Article 10 of the NATO Treaty, which declares that membership is open to any 'European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area'. In March 2004, seven more countries joined the alliance: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. That was the largest round of enlargement in the alliance's history. According to NATO as of 2005 it 'may not be the last'. At that time, three more countries—Albania, Croatia and Macedonia—were being considered for membership, and were being assisted 'to meet NATO standards and prepare for possible future membership'. Unlike the earlier expansions noted above, the expansion of NATO into the former Soviet Union's sphere of influence and control in Eastern Europe has been controversial.

NATO expansion is a complicated and in some respects a highly technical subject—especially concerning the equipment and deployment of military forces (see web links 3.21 and 3.22). But the heart of the process involves questions of military strategy and ultimately questions of international politics at the highest level. Reduced to essentials, there have been two opposing arguments regarding NATO expansion into Eastern Europe. Both arguments disclose realist ideas and concerns. The controversy demonstrates there can be debates within realism—and by implication within every IR theory discussed in this book. Each argument can be summarized as follows (see web links 3.23 and 3.24).

Those who argue in favour of NATO expansion into Eastern Europe (Ball 1998: 52–67) claim that 'the prime objective' is greater regional security. They base their argument on the claim that it could deter Russia from entertaining or engaging in territorial revisionism to recover lost territories or to intimidate its neighbours. It could also promote stability and security in the region by providing reassurance not only to its new East European member states but also to other countries in the region that are not NATO members, for example Ukraine. If NATO expanded eastward, Russia would be obliged to take into account the strategic fact that any threat or use of force against its neighbours would provoke a response from the alliance. With NATO in the area Russia would have to stop and consider the consequences of any such threats or actions. It could not intimidate smaller and weaker neighbours such as the Baltic republics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia).

Proponents of NATO expansion claim that it will confer benefits on Russia too. For example, it would restrain Russia's East European neighbours—such as Poland—from taking advantage of any weakness of Russia, thereby provoking regional instability. In other words, it would place a positive West European control on East European states with a history of suspicion, fear and even enmity vis-à-vis Russia. It would also forestall East European states from searching for security outside the alliance. Such states would not have to fear for their security if they became members of NATO. They would not be tempted by nationalism or chauvinism which could provoke regional instability; nor would they be tempted to develop and equip their armed forces with nuclear weapons. They would not be tempted to form alliances among themselves that would complicate the task of building a regional security community, and they would not tempt a united Germany to play a more independent security role in the region. The risk of any East European state going it alone and becoming a problem for everybody else would be averted if NATO were in charge in the region. The risk of a regional arms race would be lower if not eliminated, because NATO could ensure that weaponry was consistent with the overall defensive goals of the alliance.

The eastward expansion of NATO, proponents argue, would largely pre-empt any plans and actions by Russia to regard its security in Cold War terms: i.e. the mistake—as a senior US State Department official put it—of 'defining [Russia's] security at the expense of everyone else's' (Strobe Talbott, quoted by Ball 1998: 60). Instead, with NATO present there would be greater opportunities for cooperative as opposed to competitive security arrangements between Russia and the states to the west. Russian security unilateralism would decrease; consultation would increase. The possibilities of agreements between Russia and NATO to reduce the level of military forces in Eastern Europe would be very much greater in a climate of consultation and agreement than in one of rivalry and suspicion. In short, security in Eastern Europe and international order and stability beyond that region is likely to be worse—i.e. more uncertain, more provocative, more unpredictable, more combative, and ultimately more dangerous—if NATO does not expand.

Those who argue against NATO expansion raise several concerns which they believe are very serious. In June 1997 in an open letter to US President Clinton a group of fifty leading former US Senators, cabinet members in previous administrations, ambassadors, arms
control experts and foreign-policy specialists registered their opposition to expansion in the following stark terms: 'the current US-led effort to expand NATO . . . is a policy error of historical importance' (McGwire 1998: 23, 42). They based their negative assessment on four fundamental arguments.

First, it would place in doubt 'the entire post-Cold War settlement' (McGwire 1998: 23). That is because it would threaten Russia. It would drastically undermine those Russian politicians and officials who were in favour of closer and more cooperative relations with the United States and who wanted to bring about democratic reforms in Russia that would align that nation's political system more closely with those of the West. Russia expressed grave concerns about the prospect of NATO eastward expansion. If its concerns were ignored, that would be a sign in Russian eyes that the West did not take Russia seriously and was contemptuous of its fundamental security interests. Further, expansion would undermine NATO's claim to be a purely defensive and peace-loving alliance. It would provoke the antagonism of many Russian politicians and embolden those who were opposed to negotiations with the United States to reduce nuclear and other strategic weapons. It would strengthen those Russian parties and politicians, including Communists, who were opposed to democratic reform. In short, NATO expansion into the former Soviet sphere of Eastern Europe might unite all those nationalist and xenophobic political forces in Russia who opposed closer collaboration between their country and the West, particularly the United States. There was a real and deeply worrying possibility that it would reopen the Cold War division between East and West.

Second, it would draw a new and deep line of division between those former Soviet satellite countries which had moved inside NATO (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary) and those which remained outside. It would reduce the security of those nations that were not included: they would be left to fend for themselves and perhaps to seek other security alliances. That would provoke greater instability rather than less.

Third, within NATO itself, expansion would reduce the alliance's credibility at the politically most fundamental point: its promise to defend without exception any member in the event of an attack. As the alliance expanded eastward, according to this argument, its capacity to defend its member states' security and independence would diminish, and maybe its political will to do that would diminish too—if that undertaking risked all-out war with Russia. A significant factor in this argument is that some of those would-be NATO member states are much nearer to Russia, some of them harbour strong historical resentments and animosities towards Russia, some of them have domestic Russian minority problems, and some of them have unstable and undeveloped systems of government. In other words, these states are in awkward locations, have unfortunate historical memories, and lack the political foundations to be solid and reliable members of the alliance. 'NATO could be entrapped by Central European [member] states' (Ball 1998: 49).

Finally, NATO expansion into areas of Europe that are inherently more unstable and more difficult to defend might put in jeopardy the United States' commitment to the alliance. That is because of the always latent and sometimes active strain of isolationism in American political culture. This could be a fatal weakening of the alliance, because the United States has always been and would have to continue to be the political and military key to NATO's success as a defensive military organization. NATO expansion might very well encourage American isolationism, which would be a fatal blow to international peace and security.

What are the implications of this important historical debate for realism after the Cold War? It clearly reveals a fundamental point that is often obscured by IR scholars: that realists can have honest and open differences of opinion among themselves on important issues of foreign policy. Both arguments are basically realist in their values: they are both concerned with national security, regional stability, international peace and so on. They both employ instrumental language such as 'danger', 'risk', 'uncertainty', 'threat', 'capability', 'credibility', 'deterrence', 'reassurance', 'confidence'. They both clearly understand international relations in strategic realist terms, in which the primary aim is to use foreign policy and military power to defend national interests and promote international order.

In that connection, realists who favour expansion and realists who oppose it both understand statecraft as an activity that involves the responsible use of power. They both operate within the same general realist ethics of statecraft. Their differences only emerge at this point. They are concerned with the same values and they both employ the same language, but they differ in their judgements of the proposed policy and their assessments of the circumstances in which it must be carried out. One side views expansion as promoting basic realist values and the other side views it as undermining the same values. Where those in favour see an opportunity in NATO expansion that must be seized, those against see a risk that must be avoided. So each side assesses opportunity and risk differently but both sides are fully alerted to risk and both are concerned about the fundamental values of security and stability.

In that regard, the debate on NATO expansion into Eastern Europe discloses the classical and neoclassical realist emphasis on responsible statecraft and political virtues such as prudence and judgement. Responsible statecraft and political virtue are moral concerns. To understand such concerns involves normative inquiry. That cannot be grasped by neorealism, which aims at scientific explanation that repudiates normative analysis, i.e. the study of values and norms. That brings to the surface one important advantage that classical and neoclassical realism has over neorealism in IR: its ability to engage in inquiry into foreign policy issues that involve basic questions of values: for example, given the fundamental importance of the value of security and stability in world politics, should NATO expand against NATO expansion

Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky said Saturday that Eastern Europe would become a battlefield in another world war if any of its countries try to join NATO: 'Our neighbors must know that if they let NATO soldiers approach Russia's borders, Russia would destroy both NATO and the territories that are putting the world on the brink of war,' Zhirinovsky said.

Many Russian leaders, including President Boris Yeltsin, have spoken out strongly against NATO's proposed eastward expansion, although none has gone so far as firebrand Zhirinovsky.

Associated Press, 11 February 1996
eastward or should it stay where it is? Because that is a normative question that involves political judgement, there can be honest differences on the part of both practitioners and observers and there can be no scientific or objective answer. The failure to address such value questions is a clear limitation of neorealism as an IR approach.

Hegemony and the Balance of Power

The end of the Cold War raised questions about the applicability of realism as an IR theory: was it now less relevant or more relevant than previously? Did the changed circumstances render other IR theories, such as liberalism, more applicable to the situation? Did they call for any revision to realist theory? Different responses to such questions are possible. That will depend in part on how theorists read the new situation. Is the international system becoming a more integrated world based on globalization and non-state actors, in which nation-states are less significant than in the past? That is a thesis characteristic of liberal IR theories. Is international relations becoming a more hegemonic world, owing to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the only remaining superpower (see web link 3.17)? That is a thesis characteristic of realist IR theories. Realist IR theories also raise the question of how US primacy in the post-Cold War international system relates to the balance of power. Does the United States operate to defend and maintain the balance of power, or does America operate to overcome the balance of power and establish its own supremacy in world politics?

There have been debates within realism on these questions, one of the main focuses of which has been the realist arguments of John J. Mearsheimer (2001). Like other realists, Mearsheimer argues that the state is the principal actor in international politics, and that states are of necessity preoccupied with the balance of power. Furthermore, the power in question is military force: realists give much attention to the use of force and to questions that involve the various political and military uses of armed force: deterrence, nuclear weapons, war, armed intervention and so forth. As indicated earlier in this chapter, that is the case with the realist theories of Hans J. Morgenthau, Thomas Schelling and Kenneth Waltz, among many others.

Mearsheimer differs from these realist thinkers in several ways. Unlike Morgenthau but like Waltz, he regards the behaviour of states as shaped if not indeed determined by the anarchical structure of international relations. Morgenthau sees that behaviour as dictated by human nature and the prudential ethics of statespeople seeking security and survival in an anarchical world. He differs from Waltz whom he characterizes as a 'defensive realist': i.e. someone who recognizes that states must and do seek power in order to be secure and to survive, but who believe that excessive power is counterproductive, because it provokes hostile alliances by other states. For Waltz, it does not make sense, therefore, to strive for excessive power beyond that which is necessary for security and survival. Mearsheimer speaks of Waltz's theory as 'defensive realism'.

Mearsheimer agrees with Waltz that anarchy compels states to compete for power. However, he argues that states seek hegemony, that they are ultimately more aggressive than Waltz portrays them as being. The goal for a country, such as the United States, is to dominate the entire system, because only in that way could it rest assured that no other state or combination of states would even think about going to war against the United States. In the Western hemisphere, for example, the United States has long been by far the most powerful state. No other state—Canada, Mexico, Brazil—would even think about threatening or employing armed force against the United States. All major powers strive for that ideal situation. But the planet is too big for global hegemony. The oceans are huge barriers. No state would have the necessary power. Mearsheimer therefore argues states can only become the hegemon in their own region of the world.

Regional hegemons can see to it, however, that there are no other regional hegemons in any other part of the world. They can prevent the emergence and existence of a peer competitor. According to Mearsheimer, that is what the United States is trying to ensure. That is because a peer competitor might try to interfere in a regional hegemon's sphere of influence and control. For almost two centuries, since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the United States endeavoured to ensure that no great power intervened militarily in the Western hemisphere. As a great power for the past half century and longer, America has made great efforts to ensure that there is no regional hegemon in either Europe or East Asia, the two areas where there are other major or great powers and a potential peer competitor could emerge: Germany in Europe and China in East Asia. The United States confronted Imperial Germany in the First World War, Nazi Germany in the Second World War, and the Soviet Union in the Cold War, because if any of those states had gained hegemony in Europe it would be free to intervene in the Western hemisphere, and possibly threaten the security of the United States.

According to Mearsheimer, all states want to become regional hegemons. He argues that Germany will become the dominant European state and that China will likely emerge as a potential hegemon in Asia. For example, his theory leads one to believe that China eventually will want to dominate East Asia. By the same theory, if that were to happen one would also expect the United States to react to try to prevent or undercut Chinese power in East Asia. Indeed, if China became a peer competitor America could be expected to go to great lengths to contain China's influence and prevent China from intervening in other regions of the world where American national interests are at stake. That is why he refers to his theory as 'offensive realism' which rests on the assumption that great powers 'are always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal' (p. 29).

Mearsheimer, like other realists, believes that his argument has general application to all places at all times. There will always be a struggle between nation-states for power and domination in the international system. There has always been conflict, there is conflict, and there always will be conflict over power. And there is nothing that anyone can do to prevent it. This is why the title of one of his books is The Tragedy of Great Power Politics.

Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism has come in for criticism from many quarters. Some of those criticisms are levelled by liberal IR theorists. He debunks the liberal theory that democracies are less likely to wage war with each other. His theory of offensive realism has been criticized for failing to explain peaceful change and cooperation between great
powers, such as that between Britain and the United States for the past century and longer. Critics also argue, for example, that it fails to explain the emergence of the European Union, which involves the pooling of sovereignty by states in an international community. However, we shall be concerned only with selected criticisms from within realism itself. At least one potential regional hegemon has been involved in the process of European unification: Germany. Mearsheimer would explain that by the military presence of the United States in Europe, which checks Germany’s military expansion. But from within his own theory one could ask: why do American armed forces remain in Europe more than a decade after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and in the absence of any other great power trying to dominate the region?

A realist like Morgenthau would probably criticize Mearsheimer’s argument for ignoring the responsibilities of statecraft, and for leaving the impression that states are conflicting power machines that behave without any human involvement as to their management or mismanagement. There are no misadventures, misunderstandings or mistakes in the behaviour of great powers; there is only power, conflict, war, hegemony, subjugation and so on. That same criticism of a mechanistic model could be directed against Waltz’s defensive theory. A related criticism is the theory’s deficiency in empirical perceptiveness and subtlety. Mearsheimer sees no significant difference in the current and future power relationships between states in Western Europe as compared with those in East Asia. Here, it has been pointed out, ‘he is at odds with that more famous realist, Henry Kissinger, who in his book, Does America Need a Foreign Policy?, convincingly argues that for the foreseeable future there is little or no likelihood of the nations of Western Europe going to war with each other or with the United States, but that war is much more possible among the nations of Asia or between America and Asian powers’ (Francis Sempa http://wwwunc.edu/depts/diplomat/). That leads to a more general criticism: the limitations and distortions that result when the usually complicated process of historical contingency and change is explained exclusively by means of a single factor theory: in this case ‘offensive realism’. Mearsheimer’s offensive realist theory has also been criticized for failing to look at historical experiences which are contrary to his thesis, or in other words for not being sufficiently open-minded and eclectic in seeking to explain relations between great powers and the balance of power. Eclecticism, however, means opening one’s approach to the possibility of factors and forces not predicted by one’s theory. Ultimately, eclecticism would also transform theory into history. That is not what neorealist theories are content with. Mearsheimer, like Waltz, wants to come up with explanations that satisfy the concept of a ‘scientific’ theory in accordance with philosophy of science criteria. How successful they have been in that regard is still being debated.

Two Critiques of Realism

The dominance of realism in IR during the second half of the twentieth century, especially in the United States, spawned a substantial literature that criticizes many of its core assumptions and arguments (see web link 3.25). As indicated in Chapter 2, realism itself rose to a position of academic pre-eminence in the 1940s and 1950s by effectively criticizing the liberal idealism of the interwar period. Contemporary neorealism has been involved in a renewed debate with contemporary liberalism. We shall investigate that debate in Chapter 4. Here we shall confine our discussion to two important critiques of realism: an International Society critique and an emancipatory critique.

The International Society tradition (see Chapter 5) is critical of realism on two counts. First, it regards realism as a one-dimensional IR theory that is too narrowly focused. Second, it claims that realism fails to capture the extent to which international politics is a dialogue of different IR voices and perspectives. The International Society tradition is not critical of every aspect of realist thought in IR. On the contrary, International Society scholars acknowledge that classical and neoclassical realism provide an important angle of vision on world politics. They agree that there is a strain in human nature that is self-interested and combative. They share a focus of analysis in which states loom large. They operate with a conception of international relations as anarchical. They agree that power is important and that international relations consist significantly of power politics. They also agree that international theory is in some fundamental respects a theory of security and survival. They recognize that the national interest is an important value in world politics. In short, International Society scholars incorporate several elements of realism into their own approach.

However, they do not believe that realism captures all of IR or even its most important aspects. They argue that realism overlooks, ignores or plays down many important facets of international life. It overlooks the cooperative strain in human nature. It ignores the extent to which international relations form an anarchical society and not merely an anarchical system. States are not only in conflict, they also share common interests and observe common rules which confer mutual rights and duties. It ignores other important actors besides states, such as human beings and NGOs. Realism plays down the extent to which the relations of states are governed by international law. It also plays down the extent to which international politics are progressive, i.e. cooperation instead of conflict can prevail. International Society theorists recognize the importance of the national interest as a value, but they refuse to accept that it is the only value that is important in world politics.

Martin Wight (1991), a leading representative of the International Society approach, places a great deal of emphasis on the character of international politics as a historical dialogue between three important philosophies/ideologies: realism (Machiavelli), rationalism (Grotius) and revolutionism (Kant). In order to acquire a holistic understanding of IR it is necessary, according to Martin Wight, to comprehend the dialectical relations of these three basic normative perspectives (see Chapter 5).

At least one leading neoclassical realist appears to agree with Martin Wight. In a monumental study of diplomacy, the American scholar and statesman Henry Kissinger (1994: 29–55) explores the long-standing and continuing dialogue in diplomatic theory and practice between the foreign-policy outlook of pessimistic realism and that of optimistic liberalism. For example, Kissinger discerns that dialogue in the contrasting foreign policies of US Republican President Theodore Roosevelt and Democratic President Woodrow Wilson in the early twentieth century. Roosevelt was ‘a sophisticated analyst of the balance of power’ while Wilson was ‘the originator of the vision of a universal world organization, the League
of Nations'. Both perspectives have shaped American foreign policy historically. That dialogue between realism and liberalism is not confined to past and present American foreign policy; it is also evident in British foreign policy historically. Kissinger contrasts the politically cautious and pragmatic nineteenth-century British foreign policy of Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and the morally aroused and interventionist foreign policy of his Liberal counterpart, William Gladstone. Kissinger implies that both these perspectives have a legitimate place in American foreign policy and in British foreign policy, and that neither of them should be ignored. Here, then, is an implied criticism of realism: that it is inclined to ignore or at least to downplay the liberal and democratic voice in world affairs.

We thus have reason to ask whether Kissinger should be classified as a realist at all? Is he a secret member of the International Society school? We believe the correct answer to the first question is 'yes' and to the latter question 'no'. Kissinger should be regarded as a neoclassical realist. Although he portrays the Wilsonian voice in American foreign policy and the Gladstonian voice in British foreign policy as legitimate and important, it is abundantly clear from his lengthy analysis that his preferred basis for any successful foreign policy for America and Britain is the realist outlook disclosed by Roosevelt and Disraeli, with whom Kissinger strongly identifies.

Neoclassical realists could thus reply to the critique as follows. International Society scholars can be criticized for failing to recognize that while the liberal voice is important in world politics the realist voice is always first in importance. That is because it is the best perspective on the core problem of IR: war. According to realists, difficult times, such as war, demand hard choices that realists are better able to clarify than any other IR scholars or practitioners. Liberals—according to classical/neoclassical realists—tend to operate on the assumption that foreign-policy choices are easier and less dangerous than they really may be: they are the foremost theorists of peaceful, prosperous and easy times. For realists the problem with that is: what shall we do when times are difficult? If we follow the liberals we may fail to respond adequately to the challenge with appropriate hard choices and we may thus place ourselves—and those who depend on our policies and actions—at risk. In other words, realism will always be resorted to during times of crisis when hard choices have to be made, and some criteria for making those choices are required.

An alternative and very different critique of realism is that of emancipatory theory. Because realism has been such a dominant IR theory, emancipatory theorists direct their energies at providing what they consider to be a root-and-branch critique of realist assumptions and arguments. That is intended to pave the way for a complete reconceptualization of IR. Their critique of realism is central to their project of global human emancipation. Emancipatory theorists argue that IR should seek to grasp correctly how men and women are prisoners of existing international structures. IR theorists should indicate how they can be liberated from the state and from other structures of contemporary world politics which have the effect of oppressing them and thus preventing them from flourishing as they otherwise would. A central aim of emancipatory theory, then, is the transformation of the realist state-centric and power-focused structure of international politics. The goal is human liberation and fulfilment. The role of the emancipatory IR theorist is to determine the correct theory for guiding the practice of human liberation.

An emancipatory critique of realism has been developed by Ken Booth (1991). Booth (pp. 313–26) builds his critique on a familiar realist view of the ‘Westphalian system’: i.e. it is ‘a game’ that is ‘played by diplomats and soldiers on behalf of statesmen’. The ‘security game’ that states learned to play was ‘power politics, with threats producing counterthreats, alliances, counteralliances and so on’. In IR that produced an ‘intellectual hegemony of realism’: a conservative or ‘status quo’ theory based on the security and survival of existing states, and focused on strategic thinking in which the concept of military (sometimes nuclear) threats was the core of realist thought. In other words, Booth is specifically criticizing strategic realism associated with thinkers such as Thomas Schelling (1980) discussed above.

Booth claims that the realist game of power politics and military (including nuclear) strategy is now obsolete because security is now a local problem within disorganized and sometimes failed states. It is no longer primarily a problem of national security and national defence. Security is now more than ever both cosmopolitan and local at the same time: a problem of individual humans (e.g. citizens in failed states) and of the global community of humankind (facing, for example, ecological threats or nuclear extinction). Security is different in scope; it is also different in character: emancipation is the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do. War and the threat of war is one of those constraints, together with poverty, poor education, political oppression and so on. Security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin. Emancipation, not power or order, produces true security (Booth 1991: 319).

Implicit in this argument is the Kantian ‘categorical imperative’: the moral idea ‘that we should treat people as ends and not means. States, however, should be treated as means and not ends’ (Booth 1991: 319). In other words, people always come first; states are merely tools that can be discarded if they are no longer useful.

In a similar vein Andrew Linklater (1989) disputes the realist view of IR and offers an alternative emancipatory perspective to take its place (Box 3.20). Both Booth and Linklater claim that world politics can be constructed along these universal solidarist lines, with IR

**BOX 3.20 Linklater's emancipatory vision of global politics**

A new framework for world politics, based on

1. the construction of a ‘global legal and political system’ which goes beyond the state and affords protection to all human subjects;
2. the decline of self-interest and competitiveness which, according to realist thinking, sustains the state and fosters international conflict and ultimately war;
3. the rise and spread of human generosity that transcends state boundaries and extends to people everywhere;
4. the consequent development of a community of humankind to which all people owe their primary loyalty.

Linklater (1989: 199)
The consequence of that for IR is clear: realism is becoming obsolete as a theoretical apparatus for studying IR, and irrelevant as a practical attitude to world politics.

The realist response to such emancipatory critiques could be expected to include some of the following observations. Linklater's and Booth's declaration of the death of the independent state and thus of the anarchical state system, like the famous mistaken announcement of the death of Mark Twain, is premature. People across the world in their almost countless millions continue to cling to the state as their preferred form of political organization. We need only recall the powerful attraction of self-determination and political independence based on the clan for the peoples of Asia, Africa and the Middle East during the demise of European colonialism and for the peoples of Eastern Europe during the demise of the Soviet empire. When states fragment—as in the case of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War—the fragments turn out to be new (or old) states—e.g. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia. In historical terms all these major movements towards the sovereign state occurred recently—i.e. in the latter half of the twentieth century. Security continues to be based primarily on the state and the state system. It is not based on a global political-legal organization: such an entity does not exist (at least not yet). Where security is based on other social organizations, such as the family or the clan, as sometimes happens in Africa and some other parts of the world, that is because the local state has failed as a security organization. The people are trying to make the best of a bad situation. Their own state has failed them, but that does not mean they have given up on the state. What they want is what the people of many other countries already have: a developed and democratic state of their own. What they do not want is a 'global legal and political system' such as Linklater describes: that would be scarcely distinguishable from Western colonialism which they have just escaped from.

It is also necessary to mark the continuing significance of the major states. Realists underline the centrality of great powers in world politics. Great-power relations shape the international relations and influence the foreign policies of most other states. That is why realists concentrate their attention on the great powers. There is little reason to doubt that the United States, China, Japan, Russia, Germany, France, Britain, India and a few other core states will continue to assert their leading roles in world politics. There also is little reason to doubt that the people of the world depend on those states, before all others, for maintaining international peace and security. There is nobody else to provide that fundamental service.

Research Prospects and Programme

Realism is a theory, first about the security problems of sovereign states in an international anarchy, and second about the problem of international order. The normative core of realism is state survival and national security. If world politics continues to be organized on the basis of independent states with a small group of powerful states largely responsible for shaping the most important international events, then it seems clear that realism will continue to be an important IR theory. The only historical development that could render it obsolete is a world historical transformation that involved abandoning the sovereign state and the anarchical state system. That does not appear very likely in the foreseeable future.

This chapter has discussed the various main strands of realism; a major distinction was made between classical (and neoclassical) realism on the one hand and contemporary strategic realism and neorealism on the other. Which strand of realism contains the most promising research programme? John Mearsheimer (1993) says that neorealism is a general theory that applies to other historical situations besides that of the Cold War. He argues that neorealism can be employed to predict the course of international history after the Cold War. We have noted that neorealism formulates a number of important questions about the distribution of power in the international system and the power-balancing of the leading powers. Yet we have also emphasized some limitations of neorealist theory, especially as regards the analysis of cooperation and integration in Western Europe after the end of the Cold War. Some neorealists think that these patterns of cooperation can be addressed without major difficulty through the further development of neorealist analysis (see e.g. Grieco 1997). On a more sceptical view, neorealism (and also strategic realism) appears closely tied to the special historical circumstances of the East/West conflict: (1) a bipolar system based on two rival superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union) each implacably opposed to the other and prepared to risk nuclear war for the sake of its ideology; and (2) the development of nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them to any point on earth.

Since the end of the Cold War the Soviet Union has disappeared and the bipolar system has given way to one in which there are several major powers, but the United States arguably is now the only genuine superpower. Nuclear weapons remain in existence, of course. There is now a greater danger than before of the spread of nuclear weapons. In 1998 both India and Pakistan tested nuclear-weapon devices and in so doing turned the sub-continent of South Asia into an openly nuclear-weapons region. In 2002 they came to the brink of war which raised widespread anxiety about nuclear conflict and provoked the United States and some members of the European Union into concerted diplomatic efforts to defuse the situation. But none of the major powers that possess nuclear weapons—including Russia and China—gives any indication of wishing to restore the Cold War system of nuclear coercion.

We believe that leaves neoclassical realism with the most promising future research programme. We have tried to show how the debate on NATO expansion in Eastern Europe emphasized the need for discussing important questions of values when conducting inquiry into foreign policy issues. Neorealists are right in pointing to the risk of a new Cold War, but it is classical realism which is focused on analysing how the difficult choices made by state leaders may or may not bring about a new Cold War. In the debate on NATO expansion it is clearly evident that both realists in favour of expansion and realists against expansion were very concerned about this, and that they both wanted to avoid a second Cold War—even though they came to opposite conclusions about whether or not expansion would diminish
or increase the risks of that happening. Their debate was a good example of the honest differences between neoclassical realists.

On this view, a future research programme for realism would build on the work of Hans Morgenthau rather than that of Schelling or Waltz or Mearsheimer, and would address important issues of the post-Cold War state system that the narrower focus of strategic realism and neorealism cannot so readily come to grips with. Among those issues are five key ones. (1) The emergence of the United States as an unrivalled great power following the demise of the Soviet Union, and the reduced significance of Russia in world politics. The role of the United States as a paramount power is somewhat comparable to Great Britain in the nineteenth century. At that time Britain refrained from engaging in wars of conquest in Europe and remained content with employing its political skill and military assets to maintain the balance of power. The United States at the dawn of the twenty-first century is even more benign than Britain was at that time: the US appears prepared to devote itself not only to defending its own national interest but also, albeit to a lesser extent, to being a responsible defender of international peace and security. (2) The return to a contemporary version of the Concert system of great powers in which the permanent members of the UN Security Council assume the main responsibility for safeguarding international peace and security under the leadership of the United States. (3) The threat posed by peripheral 'rogue states' such as Iraq which are prepared to threaten regional peace and security but are not in a position to threaten the global balance of power. (4) The problems posed by 'failed states' and the issue of great power responsibility for the protection of human rights in a world of states. (5) The security crisis presented by audacious acts of international terrorism, particularly the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington DC, which threaten the personal security of citizens more than either the national security of states or international peace and security.

A plausible research strategy for post-Cold War realism, therefore, would involve the attempt to understand the role of an unrivalled but also a benign paramount power in an international system which must face several fundamental problems: the protection of global peace and security, the coming to grips with 'rogue states' and 'failed states' on the periphery of the state system, and the protection of citizens, particularly those of Western countries, from international terrorism.

**KEY POINTS**

- Realists usually have a pessimistic view of human nature. Realists are sceptical that there can be progress in international politics that is comparable to that in domestic political life. They operate with a core assumption that world politics consists of an international anarchy of sovereign states. Realists see international relations as basically conflictual, and they see international conflicts as ultimately resolved by war.

- Realists believe that the goal of power, the means of power and the uses of power are a central preoccupation of political activity. International politics is thus portrayed as 'power politics'. The conduct of foreign policy is an instrumental activity based on the intelligent calculation of one's power and one's interests as against the power and interests of rivals and competitors.

- Realists have a high regard for the values of national security, state survival, and international order and stability. They usually believe that there are no international obligations in the moral sense of the word—i.e. bonds of mutual duty—between independent states. For classical and neoclassical realists there is one morality for the private sphere and another and very different morality for the public sphere. Political ethics allows some actions that would not be tolerated by private morality.

- Realists place a great deal of importance on the balance of power, which is both an empirical concept concerning the way that world politics is seen to operate and a normative concept: it is a legitimate goal and a guide to responsible statecraft on the part of the leaders of the great powers. It upholds the basic values of peace and security.

- Many contemporary realists seek to provide an empirical analysis of world politics. But they hold back from providing a normative analysis of world politics because that is deemed to be subjective and thus unscientific. That attitude marks a fundamental divide between classical and neoclassical realists on the one hand and contemporary strategic realists and neorealists on the other.

- Schelling seeks to provide analytical tools for strategic thought. He views diplomacy and foreign policy, especially that of the great powers and particularly the United States, as a rational-instrumental activity that can be more deeply understood by the application of a form of mathematical analysis called 'game theory'. Coercion is a method of bringing an adversary into a bargaining relationship and getting the adversary to do what we want him or her to do without having to compel it—i.e. employ brute force which, in addition to being dangerous, is usually far more difficult and far less efficient.

- Neorealism is an attempt to explain international relations in scientific terms by reference to the unequal capabilities of states and the anarchical structure of the state system, and by focusing on the great powers whose relations determine the most important 'outcomes' of international politics. A scientific theory of IR leads us to expect states to behave in certain predictable ways. Waltz and Mearsheimer believe that bipolar systems are more stable and thus provide a better guarantee of peace and security than multipolar systems. According to that view, the Cold War was a period of international stability and peace.

- The International Society tradition is critical of realism on two counts. First, it regards realism as a one-dimensional IR theory that is too narrowly focused. Second, it claims that realism fails to capture the extent to which international politics is a dialogue of different IR voices and perspectives. Emancipatory theory claims that power politics is obsolete because security is now a local problem within disorganized and sometimes failed states, and at the same time is a cosmopolitan problem of people everywhere regardless of their citizenship. It is no longer exclusively or even primarily a problem of national security and national defence.

**QUESTIONS**

- Realists are pessimistic about human progress and cooperation beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. What are the reasons given for that pessimism? Are they good reasons?
This chapter sets forth the liberal tradition in IR. Basic liberal assumptions are: (1) a positive view of human nature; (2) a conviction that international relations can be cooperative rather than conflictual; and (3) a belief in progress. In their conceptions of international cooperation liberal theorists emphasize different features of world politics. Sociological liberals highlight transnational non-governmental ties between societies, such as communication between individuals and between groups. Interdependence liberals pay particular attention to economic ties of mutual exchange and mutual dependence between peoples and governments. Institutional liberals underscore the importance of organized cooperation between states; finally, republican liberals argue that liberal democratic concepts and forms of government are of vital importance for inducing peaceful and cooperative relations between states. The chapter discusses these four strands of liberal thought and a debate with neorealism to which it has given rise. The concluding section evaluates the prospects for the liberal tradition as a research programme in IR.

**Summary**

**Introduction: Basic Liberal Assumptions**

**Sociological Liberalism**

**Interdependence Liberalism**

**Institutional Liberalism**

**Republican Liberalism**

**Neorealist Critiques of Liberalism**

**The Retreat to Weak Liberalism**

**The Counter-attack of Strong Liberalism**

**WEB LINKS**

Web links mentioned in the chapter plus additional links can be found on the Online Resource that accompanies this book.

www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/jackson_sorensen3e/