

# Inquiring Minds topic – 31 May 2018

Albert E. Myers- Moderator

## What kind of an international order do we seek?

Which is the better approach to U.S. foreign relations - realism or idealism? - the "internationalists" or the "isolationists"?

What would you suggest? - and to what ends? - and how to achieve this?

**Related questions include:**

How important are the United Nations, NATO, the World Bank, the International Court of Justice, INTERPOL and other cooperative bodies to the United States of America? - should we remain in them, and/or seek to modify them?

What about international agreements?

Should the U. S. continue NSA surveillance of its allies?

Should our government attempt to influence foreign elections?

What rules should apply in selling weapons to other nations?

Is there an end game for the "Global war on Terror"?

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## The liberal international order mounts a comeback

▪ [washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-liberal-international-order-mounts-a-comeback/2018/03/11/47af1b50-254d-11e8-b79d-f3d931db7f68\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-liberal-international-order-mounts-a-comeback/2018/03/11/47af1b50-254d-11e8-b79d-f3d931db7f68_story.html)

The defenders of what's called the "liberal international order" have recently suffered setbacks from adversaries inside and outside their home countries. But those who want to see the Western-led post-World War II system survive or even thrive are plotting its resurrection.

When the United States and European countries came together in the second half of the 20th century to build multilateral relationships and institutions to strengthen and spread liberal values such as rule of law, democracy, open markets and human rights, it was an aberration. The project ran counter to centuries of international politics based on brute strength, solipsism, greed and war. In France this weekend, former White House official Stephen K. Bannon told far-right nationalists that "[history is on our side](#)" — and he wasn't entirely wrong.

While Bannon was working to undermine what he and his like deride as "globalism," a group of American and European officials, lawmakers and experts were meeting here to figure out how to save it. The German Marshall Fund's Brussels Forum kicked off

with a call to action.

“We lost sight of what it took to create this international order and what an act of defiance of history and even defiance of human nature this order has been,” author Robert Kagan told the group. “We have the capacity to push back — we just need to understand the pushback needs to start occurring.”

Internationalists share a realization that the order is at grave risk, and along with it the seven decades of relative growth, prosperity and peace it provided. Nationalism and populism are ascendant in the United States and Europe. Authoritarianism led by Russia and China is on the march around the world.

The West assumed after the Cold War that worldwide acceptance of liberal values was inevitable, but alas, history did not end. Geopolitical competition resumed. The negative effects of globalization drove discontent with the liberal open-society model. Adversaries took advantage. Then came the dual shocks of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump.

Some say that liberal democracy simply didn't address the needs and desires of its populations. Others say the liberal international order was never truly liberal, international or orderly. The mission to defend it must include acknowledging and addressing those shortcomings.

But the first task is simply to “keep it alive,” Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) told the forum. Active U.S. government leadership will be impossible so long as Trump is president because he doesn't support things such as projecting liberal values into other countries, trade liberalization or multilateral institutions.

Therefore, the task at hand for defenders of the liberal international order is to “build new alliances within our societies and between our societies,” Murphy said.

Bannon's project is to unite nationalists on the left and right against the system. In reaction, internationalist Democrats and Republicans are renewing their alliance to fight back. Rep. Michael R. Turner (R-Ohio) told me that connecting the mission back to the American people was crucial.

“Democracies lead by their electorates coming along and supporting the agenda and the direction of the Western structure,” he said. “That's what had been missing for a while.”

The transatlantic alliance must also recognize the failure of its decades-long effort to court Russia and China to join the rules-based order. Democracies must once again stand up to and resist authoritarian efforts to undermine Western institutions and values.

The Russian government is attacking democracies and seeking to undermine the liberal order on a constant basis. China's increasingly aggressive leadership is touting its program of state-controlled modernization as a model for the developing world, while it works to reset global norms in its own interest.

As far as they are concerned, the liberal international order was always exclusionary and never a viable end state for the entire world.

“From the very beginning, this was a Western project and Western-centered,” said Wang Dong, an international relations professor at Peking University. “This concept of liberal international order is insufficient and inaccurate in terms of describing what kind of order we are in.”

Even if proponents are successful in defending the Western system from internal and external attack, it will be forever changed. We can no longer expect that the principles of liberal democracy will expand across the globe. We can no longer assume the United States will carry the bulk of the burden.

But the system the Atlantic community built has a half-century head start on its challengers. Shoring up its foundations by reforming multilateral institutions, addressing the grievances of those left behind economically, defending the independence and integrity of the free media, and protecting the mechanics of democracies — such as elections — are a good start.

The liberal international order is far from perfect, but it is preferable to the alternative, an international system ruled by naked self-interest and tyranny of the powerful. The new alliance to defend it is mobilizing now. The stakes couldn't be higher.

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**Also read:** <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/saving-realism-called-realists> and if you short of time simply scan the following article.

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## Realism VS Idealism in Foreign Policy

[differencebetween.net/miscellaneous/politics/realism-vs-idealism-in-foreign-policy](https://differencebetween.net/miscellaneous/politics/realism-vs-idealism-in-foreign-policy)

April 16, 2017

Scholars and academics have always tried to provide a comprehensive explanation on the dynamics that rule the relations among States and the possibility of cooperation among different countries. The basic assumption behind the construction of the major IR theories is that we live in an anarchic world. The lack of a centralized government or enforcement mechanism has posed many challenges to the definition and the support of international cooperation. In fact, while international institutions have flourished and international law has become more comprehensive, there is still no “international governance”.

Let us think about [this](#) concept for a moment: within a country, there is a government, a clear set of laws, a judiciary system and an executive apparatus. Conversely, at the international level there is no such thing as a superior centralized government, able to dictate rules and to enforce them. In the [realm of foreign policy](#), relations are among States, and there is no guarantee that international rules and norms will be respected.

Indeed, in the international scenario, institutions and rules to regulate the dynamics among States have been created. The main ones are:

- International organizations: United Nations (UN), International Labor Office (ILO), World Health Organization (WHO), International Office for Migration (IOM), European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), among others;

Such institutions deal with security, development, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and provide (or should provide) a common, neutral ground where negotiations and discussions among Members States can [take](#) place. However, States willingly give up part of their sovereignty and autonomy to become parties to such organizations and to abide by their rules.

- International treaties encompassing both economic and [political](#) issues; and
- Bilateral or multilateral agreements.

Yet, despite the existence of such bodies, the lack of a centralized government or enforcement mechanism has posed many challenges to the definition and the support of international cooperation.

## The Security Dilemma

The major difficulty that the world anarchy presents is the “Security dilemma”. This term refers to a situation in which actions by a State that aims to increase its security (i.e. creating alliances or increasing its military strengths) are perceived as a threat by other States. Such dynamics and perceptions lead to an increase in tensions that may result in a conflict.

The Security Dilemma can be articulated in three main points.

1. Countries fear that other countries could cheat: the absence of a unitary central mechanism to control countries’ behavior could result in cheating as countries will not incur in any repercussions for their dishonest behavior;
2. The Security Dilemma is based on a subjective perception of vulnerability; therefore, States could misinterpret other countries’ behavior because of their own biased judgment.
3. The [balance](#) between offensive and defensive weapons is at the core of the balance among countries. Yet, as it is not easy to distinguish among defensive and offensive arms, mistrust and tensions easily arise.

Many scholars have dealt with the assumption of an anarchic world and the consequent insurgence of the Security Dilemma. It is interesting to note that from the same starting point, opposite outcomes have been reached. The two main opposed perspective are realism and idealism (or liberalism) – that have, then, evolved into neorealism and neoidealism (or neoliberalism).

## Realism:

Hobbes, Machiavelli and Moregenthau – the most prominent realist scholars – had a clear and pessimistic view of the world. In fact, classical realists viewed States – and human beings – as selfish and egoistic entities whose only goal was power and survival in an anarchical society. For instance, according to the classical scholars, States lived in a status of [war](#) against each other and every action was dictated by self-interest and struggle for power.

In the realist perspective:

- There can be no cooperation among States:
- In order to maintain peace within a country and to dominate the egoistic and brutal instincts of the citizens, the government must act as a strong and merciless power;
- States and human beings have the same corrupt and selfish nature;
- Just as human beings want to prevail over other human beings, States want to prevail over other States;
- There can be no trust among States; and
- Anarchy cannot be controlled.

Classical realism also rejects the possibility of creating international institutions where negotiations and peaceful debates can take place. Indeed, this assumption has changed with the passing of time when international institutions (both governmental and non-governmental) have begun to play a more important role in the international scenario. Realism has evolved into neorealism.

### **Neorealism:**

While maintaining the skeptical stance of the realist perspective, neorealists accept the existence of an international structure that constrains States' behaviors.

They affirm that:

- The international asset is achieved through asymmetrical cooperation; and
- The international structure reflects the distribution of power among countries.

The exponential growth of international institutions is undeniable and under everyone's eyes. Therefore, neorealists cannot claim that the possibility of creating international organizations is an illusion. Yet, they believe that institutions are a mere reflection of the distribution of power in the world (based on self-interested calculations of great powers) and that they are not an effective way to solve the world's anarchy. On the contrary, according to the neorealist perspective, the institutionalized structure of our anarchic world is the very reason why States are egoistic and selfish.

### **Idealism and neoidealism:**

Idealism (or liberalism) has a more positive perception of the world of international relations and, according to this perspective, international institutions play a pivotal role in the creation and maintenance of a peaceful international environment.

The idealist theory has its roots in Kant's belief that there is the possibility of perpetual peace among States. According to Kant, human beings can learn from their past and their mistakes. In addition, he believed that an increase in trade, in the number of international organizations and in the number of democratic countries in the system could lead to peace.

In other words, Kant (and the idealist perspective) believe that:

- Human beings and States are not necessarily selfish, brutal and egoistic;
- There is no need to have a strong and merciless power to maintain peace both within the country and among different countries;
- There are elements that can increase the possibility of having peaceful relations among countries:

1. Increase in trade (both bilateral and multilateral);
  2. Increase in the number of international institutions;
  3. Increase in the number of democracies in the international system – such assumptions links back to the democratic peace theory that assumes that democracies are less likely to initiate conflicts with other countries; and
- Global cooperation and peace is possible.

As in the case of realism and neorealism, neoliberalism (or neoidealism) is the recent elaboration of classical idealism.

Again, the main difference between the classical and the new form is the idea of structure. Neoliberals think that the structure of the international system fosters the creation of international organizations that are information providers and reduce the likeliness to cheat. In this case, the structure of the system itself implies the possibility of cooperation.

Keohane, one of the main scholars of the neoliberal tradition, identifies the three main strands of this perspective:

- International regimes: defined as the spontaneous emergence of international norms around specific issue;
- Complex interdependence: the growing complexity of international relations inevitably leads to the creation of strong and tangled ties among countries; and
- Democratic peace: just as in the classic perspective, democracies are believed to be less likely to initiate conflicts.

As we can see, the three pillars of the neoidealist perspective are an elaboration of the Kantian's theory.

## Summary

The different approaches used to analyze International relations offer quite different interpretations of the dynamics that regulate States' behavior in the international environment.

It is important to note that both realism and idealism attempt to deal with the anarchy of the international system. The main problem of an anarchic system is the Security Dilemma: the absence of a centralized government implies that countries fear other countries may cheat and the lack of reliable information leads to a subjective vulnerability. As we have seen, the two perspectives have the same starting point but their outcomes are very different.

The first entirely refuses the idea of cooperation and peace among States. Global harmony cannot be reached because of the very nature of countries and human beings that are seen as egoistic, brutal and selfish entities. Even the neorealist perspective – that accepts the existence of international institutions – believes that the structure of the international order is a mere reflection of game powers among countries, and not a genuine attempt to create peaceful relations.

Conversely, the second accepts the possibility of a global cooperative environment enabled by the increase in trade and by the creation of international institutions that play the role of information providers and that reduce the likeliness of cheating.