



POLS 318: Theories of IR
Lecture 5 (02.03.2021):
Material Theories v.2.

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Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 Material theories - Neorealism
- 3 Structural Theories - PTT
- 4 Extra Material

Review

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Material theories: system level of analysis
- Realism:
 - Core principles.
 - The concept of **Power**.
 - *Balance of Power* - Multipolarity before 1914.
- Neorealism:
 - Reductionist structural theory.
 - Security - not power.
 - Anarchy.
 - Bipolar world (cold war).

Questions?? Email me!



Neorealism (Waltz 1979)

REALISM 2.0?

- Advanced version of classic realism.
- International system → state behavior.
- Simplifying assumptions enhance structural framework.
- Parsimony - Accuracy.

Assumptions

- 1 Anarchy and self-help.
- 2 States - primary actors in international politics.
- 3 Maximize *Security*.
- 4 Increase power only if no security risk.

The Security Dilemma

The means by which a state tries to increase its security, and lead to decrease in the security of others (Jervis 1978)

- Pursuit of influence → harms others' security.
- Why a dilemma?

Key Themes

- ① Conflict in anarchic system (Spiral model).
- ② Offensive - defensive balance (and differentiation).



The Security Dilemma

TRIGGERING INSECURITY

(1) Arms race

- Increase in arms makes rival less powerful.
- Incentives for rival to arm/balance.
- Offensive / Defensive increase.
- Signaling intentions ("greedy" behavior).
- Increase in force: size and types.

The Security Dilemma

TRIGGERING INSECURITY

(2) Incentives for expansion

- Insecure rival → expand to compensate.
- Resources, strategic depth, secure borders.
- NATO enlargement into central and east Europe (Russian actions).

RISKS FROM MISPERCEPTIONS

- Intentions and spiral escalation.
- Wrong interpretation of arms increases.

The Security Dilemma

Israel - UAR Tensions (1960)





War and the Security dilemma

OFFENSIVE - DEFENSIVE BALANCE

Offense dominates → **higher risks for war:**

- War is viewed as quick & profitable.
- Expansion is viewed as profitable.
- First strike and preemption.



Limitations and Challenges

Neorealism

- Abstract, ignores details.
- Less attention to 'lower-level' interactions.
- Survival → not the only interest.

Security Dilemma

- Inconsistent logic - uncertainty.
- Offensive realism.

Power Transition Theory

BASICS

- Focus → strongest states and their interactions.
- Status-Quo and power concepts.
- Dominant state: sets order (political, economic, military, etc.).
- Importance of control over rules of the system.
- Benefits from existing order.



Power Transition Theory

Global interactions under PTT

- Structure: Hierarchy with several 'clusters' of states.
- Sources of dominant state: economic and military power.
- Satisfied and Dissatisfied states.
- *Relative power.*
- War over control over 'rules of the game'.
- Unlike realism - power is not enough!



Dominant State



International system post-1945

USA - a global giant

- Setting the rules...
- Economic: *Bretton Woods*, GATT, WTO.
- Politics: democratic institutions, human rights.
- Military: NATO, UN-supported limited interventions.

Power Transition Theory

Conditions for War

- Dissatisfied nation and relative power.
- Costly war (potentially system altering).
- Rivals equal in power → power transition.
- Realist BOP under the PTT view.
- Conditions that **prevent war**:
 - ① Preemptive attack by dominant power.
 - ② Rising power delays conflict until ready.

Power Transition Theory

Empirical evidence

- Germany in WW2.
- UK - US at the end of 19th century.

The Cold war and beyond (Lemke 1997)

- The challenger (USSR) never achieved parity.
- Soviet failure to sustain competition.
- Post cold-war peace: most states are satisfied.
- Dissatisfied but lack power (Russia, China) - less so today.

Structural Theories - Summary





Recommended readings

More studies on material theories as PTT:

- 1 Douglas Lemke and Jacek Kugler, "The Evolution of the Power Transition Perspective" in Lemke and Kugler eds., *Parity and War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) pp. 3-34
- 2 Seva Gunitsky, "From Shocks to Waves: Hegemonic Transitions and Democratization in the Twentieth Century", *International Organization* 68:3 (2014), 561-597.
- 3 Fiammenghi, Davide. "The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis." *International Security* 35:4 (2011): 126-154.