

Realism

Class 5 • Monday 21 September 2026 — classical, neoclassical and structural realism. The Machiavellian–Hobbesian model; the capitals of force, power and interest; anarchy, self-help and the security dilemma. The professor presents, modeling the format of the class.

Fall 2026 • Mondays 6:00–8:45 PM • Building 51, Room 1101 • Dept. of Political Science & Public Administration

Assigned: Burchill et al., ch. 2 (Realism) • Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* — the Six Principles • Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, Bk. I • Castro, *Theory of International Relations*, ch. V

One king standing, one king fallen, and a board with no referee. The world as the realist paradigm insists on describing it, before anyone asks what it ought to be.

“

*We were compelled at first to advance our empire to what it is,
above all by fear, then by honor, and lastly by interest.*

The Athenian envoys before the Spartan assembly, 432 BC

THUCYDIDES • PELOPONNESIAN WAR, BK. I, 75

*Twenty-five centuries before the trinomial was named, an empire explained itself in three terms and no others.
Fear is force, honor is power, interest is interest.*

“

*He who holds power generally holds the right in the affairs of
State, and he who is weak will have difficulty escaping blame.*

Cardinal Richelieu, Political Testament

RICHELIEU • CHIEF MINISTER OF FRANCE, 1624-1642

*The emblematic statement of classical realism: human nature crudely exposed, driven by the instinct to obtain
power, to keep it, and to increase it.*

Tonight we suspend judgment before we pass it. Following Husserl's *epoché* (phenomenology), we accept these two sentences as sufficient fact — as instances of a paradigm — before asking what they are worth. Realism must first be understood on its own terms; the objections come afterwards, and they come hard.

The first school and the model for your own presentations

Four classes built an object and audited a method. From tonight the deck belongs to the schools. I present first — and I present *through the six questions from Class 4*, so that the format is visible before you have to use it.

CLASSES 1-3

The object

Phenomenon, unit, currency: how the international gives itself to thought; the state anatomized; power as possession, relation and structure.

CLASS 4

The method

Theory and reality; the four functions — describe, explain, predict, prescribe; the six questions every presentation must answer.

CLASS 5

Realism

The oldest and most widely known school, run through all six questions — from Sun Tzu to the SIPRI rearmament figures for 2025.

THE UNIT

State-centric

Realism's working assumption: the state is the principal actor, with exclusive prerogatives. Everything else is derivative.

One warning before we begin: realism is not a doctrine you adopt or reject at the door. It is a *paradigm* — a theory whose degree of adherence to reality has kept it valid across twenty-five centuries.

MOVEMENT I

The Ontology of Realism

Realism is a theory of *what there is*. It rests on perceiving reality as it presents itself — *Sein*, being as it stands — including the way human nature stands within it. Before the models and the diagrams, a claim about the world.

EPOCHÉ • SEIN • KPFI AND PDNV • THE SIX FOUNDERS • MACHIAVELLI • HOBBS • RICHELIEU •
RAISON D'ÉTAT

Machiavelli with *The Prince*, Hobbes with the *Leviathan*, Bismarck with the map — and Hobbes's sovereign rising over all three, sword in one hand and crosier in the other.

A theory of what there is — not of what ought to be

A definition marks out the field within which an object is studied; the concept follows from it. So we begin with what realism claims about the world — and only then with what realists claim about each other.

THE ONTOLOGICAL WAGER

Two ways of asking the first question — and realism takes the left one.

Sein

BEING • WHAT IS

The entity exists in itself, independently of our knowledge. Knowledge must fit the entity, not the entity our knowledge.

Question: **what happens?**

Sollen

OUGHT • WHAT SHOULD BE

The norm precedes the fact; the world is measured against a standard set outside it. Idealism, and the law.

Question: **what is right?**

The two questions are both legitimate. They are not the same question.

AND SO THE UNIT OF ACCOUNT FOLLOWS

- **FORCE** coercive capability, actual and latent
- **POWER** the ability to obtain an outcome
- **INTEREST** the objective the outcome serves

- **Realism is ontological.** It is concerned with what exists. The real entity *exists in itself, independently of our knowledge*, and our knowledge must fit the entity rather than the reverse.
- **Its currency is a trinomial.** Force, power and interest — the **KFPI** — at once conceptual and explanatory. Every realist argument in this deck reduces to an arrangement of those three.
- **It is not only about states.** The glorification of conquest and the manipulation of others are recognizable in professional and family life too. **Classical realism does not operate only at the level of macropolitics.**
- **Amoral, not immoral — the distinction that carries the weight.** Realism suspends the moral question at the level of *explanation*; it does not abolish it at the level of *conduct*. The statesman still chooses, and prudence — not indifference — is the virtue the tradition prescribes.
- **Its caricature.** Anthony Lang: “*amoral analysts who focus only on power, or immoral Machiavellians.*” Tonight we test the original instead.

A note on vocabulary: **ontology** asks what exists; **epistemology** asks how we may know it; **methodology** asks by what procedure. Realism is a strong claim at the first level, a modest one at the second, and largely silent at the third — which is why it hosts positivists and historians alike.

KFPI and PDNV: realism as a dialectic — not a slogan

The most useful thing one can do with realism is to refuse to leave it alone with force. The brute logic of the capitals has a standing counterpoint, and what states actually do is the resultant of the two.

THE DIALECTIC OF THE REALIST PARADIGM

Castro (2016): *a thesis, an antithesis, and the behavior that results.*

THESES • PRIMARY DATUM

KFPI the capitals of
force — power — interest

Realism's central category, at once conceptual and explanatory.



ANTITHESIS • SECONDARY DATUM

PDNV the standards of
deterrence — norms — values

The counterpoint to the brute logic of force.



SYNTHESIS

Normatively balanced synthetic behavior

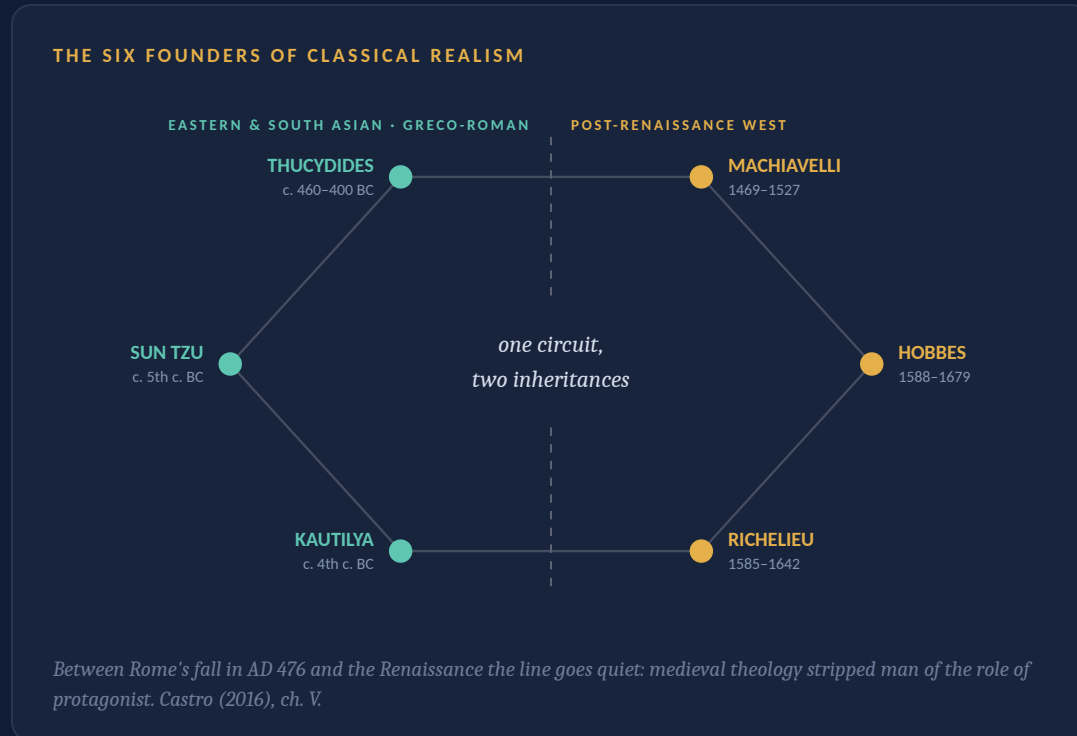
Neither pure force nor pure norm — what states actually do.

Castro, *Theory of International Relations*, ch. V.

- **The thesis — KFPI.** Force, power and interest: the primary datum, the capitals a state actually holds and spends.
- **The antithesis — PDNV.** Deterrence, norms and values: the secondary datum, the counterpoint to the brute logic of force — and the reason realism is not a licence.
- **The synthesis. Normatively balanced synthetic behavior** — neither pure force nor pure norm, but what states actually do when both press on them at once.
- **Why this matters for method.** It makes realism *falsifiable at the level of behavior*: name the two columns for any episode, and say where the conduct landed between them.
- **How to use it, in one instruction.** Write the KFPI column and the PDNV column for the case in front of you, then **locate the conduct on the segment between them** — and say what moved it there. The position is the finding; the vocabulary is only the ruler. A state that pays a real price for a norm has told you something the capability tables cannot.

Six founders, two inheritances, one continuous argument

Set the founders of classical realism in a flattened hexagon, cut by a dotted line: three from the ancient East and the Greco-Roman world, three from post-Renaissance Europe. The circuit is closed — the argument never actually stops.



- **Left of the line.** **Sun Tzu**, the strategy of deception and economy of force; **Thucydides**, the narrative of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) as the corollary of realism in politics; **Kautilya**, statecraft written as technique in the *Arthashastra*.
- **Right of the line.** **Machiavelli**, the prince who must know how to use both natures; **Hobbes**, the state of nature and the sword that ends it; **Richelieu**, *raison d'état* made an instrument of government.
- **The medieval silence.** Between the fall of Rome in AD 476 and the late fifteenth century the line goes quiet, and the reason is precise: medieval theology **stripped man of the role of protagonist** of his own destiny. Aquinas's *finis politicae est bonum commune* belongs to a different universe.
- **What they share.** Security, survival, and the logic by which power is used to secure both. Twenty-five centuries, one question.

Two Asian founders, and a model older than the state

The canon begins realism in Athens and resumes it in Florence. Two older traditions had already formalized it — and one of them left a diagram.

THE RAJAMANDALA • THE CIRCLE OF STATES
Kautilya, Arthashastra, c. 300 BC.

ARIMITRA • the enemy's ally

MITRA • the ally

ARI • the enemy

VIJIGISHU
the seeker

rings alternate: rival, partner, rival

THE FOUR INSTRUMENTS

SAMA
conciliation

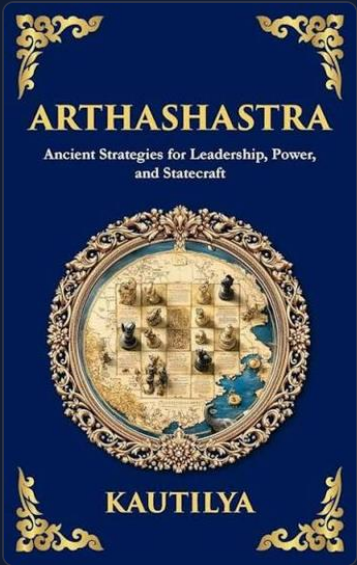
DANA
gifts and payment

BHEDA
division of the enemy

DANDA
force

Alternating rings: each neighbor is a rival, each neighbor-of-a-neighbor a partner. Escalate only as far as the objective requires.

- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, c. 5th century BC. “All warfare is based on deception.” War is a calculable instrument, not a trial of virtue — and its highest form wins without fighting.
- Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, c. 300 BC. Adviser to Chandragupta Maurya. A complete science of statecraft: taxation, espionage, alliance and war, written as **technique** rather than as ethics.
- The *rajamandala*, and why it matters. Neighbors are rivals; the neighbor beyond the neighbor is a partner. A **structural theory of alignment** eighteen centuries before Waltz — derived from geometry, not from human nature.
- Why this belongs in a non-centric course. Realism is not a Western invention that others later imported. It is **the recurring answer of any state system without a court of appeal**, and it was reached independently in China and India.
- And the caution that goes with it. Convergence proves the *question* is general, not that the answer is complete. The same East Asia that produced Sun Tzu also produced the **tributary system** — a durable hierarchy, not a balance of power — which is precisely the anomaly the English School and the constructivists will press on us later in the term.

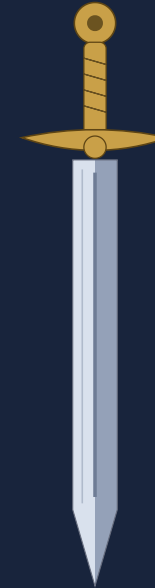


Kautilya, *Arthashastra* — the science of statecraft, c. 300 BC.

The state of nature and the sword that ends it

De Cive appeared in 1642, the *Leviathan* in 1651 — both written through the English Civil War, with the author in exile in Paris. Hobbes did not theorize disorder from a library. He watched it.

- **The famous sentence.** In the state of nature there is “*continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.*”
- **Why covenants are not enough.** “*Covenants, without the sword, are but words.*” The realist objection to international law, three centuries early.
- **The solution, and its absence abroad.** Within the state the Leviathan imposes force and law, and peace follows. Between states no sovereign exists. **The state of nature moves upstairs.**
- **Hobbes's own hedge, rarely quoted.** Sovereigns, unlike men, sustain “*the industry of their subjects*” — so anarchy between states is **survivable** in a way anarchy between persons is not.



*“Covenants, without the sword,
are but words.”*

— Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ch. XVII

The sentence that divides this course. Every school from Class 6 onward is, in one way or another, an argument that words can do more than Hobbes allowed.

Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1606), I.vii — the tragedy the model leaves out: “*I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself / And falls on th' other.*” The prince is taught to calculate. The drama asks what happens when the calculation is **correct** and the prince is destroyed anyway.

Raison d'état: the moment realism becomes a job description

Machiavelli advised a prince; Hobbes explained a condition. Richelieu *ran a state on the theory*.



Cardinal de Richelieu, 1585–1642. After Philippe de Champaigne.

- **The concept, stated precisely.** *Raison d'état*: the interests of the state stand above private interests and above every faction within it, and **require no legitimating source outside themselves.**
- **The test case.** A cardinal of the Roman Church subsidized Protestant Sweden from 1631 and brought France into the war against the Catholic Habsburgs in 1635.
- **Why no rival theory predicts it.** Confession is not an interest; *encirclement* is. A **crucial case**: religion should have been most likely to fix the alignment, and did not.

THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR • 1618–1648 • FOUR PHASES

BOHEMIAN 1618–25 Defenestration of Prague; Frederick V routed at White Mountain, 1620.	DANISH 1625–29 Christian IV beaten; Edict of Restitution, 1629 — Habsburg high tide.	SWEDISH 1630–35 Gustavus Adolphus lands, paid by France; Breitenfeld 1631, Lützen 1632.	FRENCH 1635–48 France declares war on Spain; Westphalia, 24 October 1648.
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Cost: perhaps **a third of the population of the German lands** · the deadliest European war before 1914.

It begins as a war of religion and ends as a war of state interest.

Bridge to practice — this is not a period costume: every time a government today supports a movement whose values it openly opposes — in the Sahel, in the Gulf, in the Horn — it is running Richelieu's calculation. **Ask which interest an alignment serves before asking which identity it expresses.**

Seven premises the world is free to contradict

Seven premises, each set against the Machiavellian text that states it.

PREMISE	IN MACHIAVELLI'S OWN WORDS
1 • Human nature is selfish, and that conduct shows in the dealings of states.	<i>“It is good to be and to seem merciful, faithful, humane and religious, but one must have the capacity to turn to the opposite attributes should necessity require.”</i>
2 • War is an instrument of politics, serving the survival strategies reason of state prescribes.	<i>“The prince must have no other objective, nor thought, nor take as his own art anything that is not war, its order and its discipline.”</i>
3 • The state maximizes its calculus of power against constraints from within and from without.	<i>“Princes must guard against two things: one internal — their subjects; the other external — foreign powers.”</i>
4 • Militarism and defense policy are the means of holding, at rising cost, the capitals of KFPI.	<i>“Princes who take more interest in soft things than in arms lose their dominions.”</i>
5 • Low international controllability — relative entropy — forces actors to put their own agendas first.	<i>“The prince will have to contend with the ambition of a few, who may easily be controlled in many ways.”</i>
6 • The state is the principal actor , with exclusive prerogatives.	<i>“All the States that have ever existed are and have always been republics or principalities.”</i>
7 • KFPI is distributed unequally , producing a kratological hierarchy within a world order.	<i>“There are two kinds of combat: one with laws and the other with force ... Power is in fact to be found where the decision lies.”</i>

How to read a premise: each line is a **defeasible proposition**, not an axiom — it states what the paradigm expects, and names the observation that would embarrass it. Premises 1 and 6 are the *hard core* in Lakatos's sense: abandon either and you are no longer doing realism. Premises 3, 5 and 7 belong to the *protective belt*, and each generation has rewritten them — which is precisely the family quarrel we reach on slide 17.

Sources: Machiavelli, *Il Principe* (1532) and *Discorsi* (1531) · Castro, *Theory of International Relations* (FUNAG, 2016), ch. V.

MOVEMENT II

From Human Nature to Structure

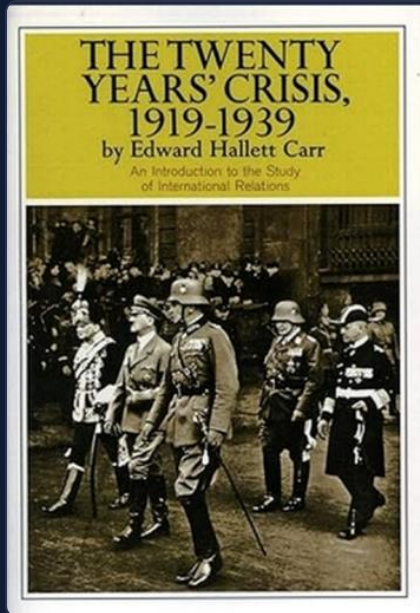
Classical realism explains war by what men are. Structural realism explains it by the shape of the system they inhabit — and insists that the two explanations are not the same, and that only one of them is a theory.

Salvador Dalí, *Premonition of Civil War*, 1936. Power is often very symbolic. It bears marks — and scars — that are clearly projected into the archeology of the human soul. Dalí's painting is the zenith of a body tearing itself apart, in a clear allusion to the depths of human nature as one of the main causes of war.



The Twenty Years' Crisis — published as the war began

Carr's book went to press in the summer of 1939 and appeared weeks after Germany invaded Poland. It is the text that turns realism from a disposition into a critique.



First edition 1939; the passages on German revisionism were quietly revised for 1946.

- **The charge.** Interwar liberal internationalism was **utopian**: it mistook what it wished for what was, and treated the interests of satisfied powers as universal principles.
- **The famous formulation.** Theories of international morality are “*the product of dominant nations or groups of nations.*” Cox’s “*theory is always for someone*” is Carr with a Marxist accent.
- **The evidence.** The League of Nations, founded in 1920, failed at Manchuria in 1931 and at Ethiopia in 1935. The decline of the liberal *ideary* dates precisely to this failure.
- **What is usually forgotten.** Carr is **not** a pure realist. Realism carried to its conclusion is sterile — pure power gives no ground for action at all. He wants the two in tension, which is what the KFPI–PDNV dialectic formalizes.
- **Carr’s own blind spot, and it is instructive.** The first edition treats German revisionism as a demand for peaceful change that ought to be accommodated. He quietly softened those passages in 1946. **The theorist who taught us to distrust wishful thinking was not immune.**

“The characteristic vice of the utopian is naivety; of the realist, sterility.”

— E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939)

Keep this sentence for the exam. It is the best one-line defense against the charge that this course is teaching you cynicism.

The six principles and the will to dominate

Politics Among Nations gave the post-war discipline its textbook and its vocabulary — an *amoral* international politics, not an immoral one.

PRINCIPLES 1-2

Objective laws, and interest as power

Politics is governed by objective laws rooted in human nature. The signpost that makes international politics intelligible is **interest defined in terms of power** — the concept that saves foreign policy from moralism and from guesswork alike.

PRINCIPLES 3-4

Interest varies; morality is not universal

Interest is objective, but its *content* changes with circumstance. Moral principles cannot be applied to state action in the abstract — **prudence**, the weighing of consequences, is the supreme political virtue.

PRINCIPLES 5-6

No nation's morals are God's; politics is autonomous

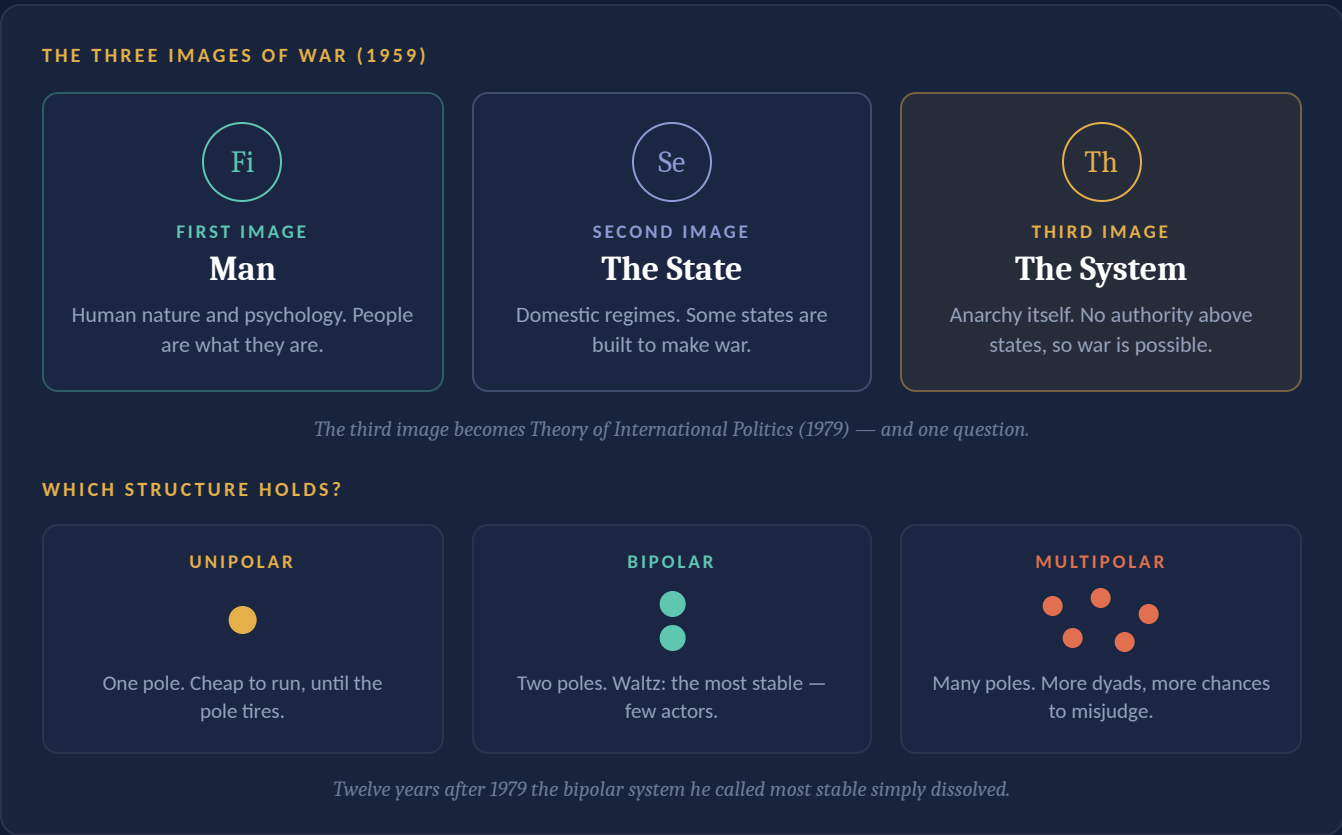
To identify the moral aspirations of one nation with the laws that govern the universe is the sin of hubris. And the political sphere is **autonomous**: the statesman asks how policy affects power, as the economist asks how it affects wealth.

***Animus dominandi* — and the sentence to draw out of it:** the will to dominate **is not exhausted in itself**. It marks out a space of political advantage — *even where security rests upon nuclear terror*. Morgenthau's realism ends by justifying the weapons whose use it cannot morally defend.

Source: Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (1948), ch. 1.

Three places to look for a cause — and the one that became a theory

Man, the State, and War asks where the explanation of war belongs. *Theory of International Politics* answers, and turns realism into a system-level science.



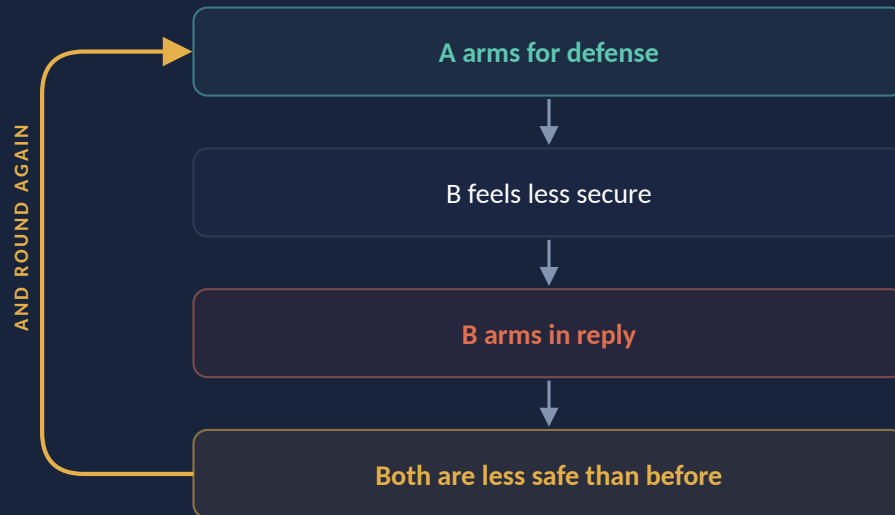
- **Why the third image wins.** The first two are **reductionist**: they explain by the attributes of units. Only the third explains why states of different natures behave alike in like positions.
- **What anarchy means.** Not chaos — the absence of authority above states. From that one condition follow self-help, the security dilemma, and balances that form whether or not anyone wills them.
- **The wager on bipolarity.** Two great powers misread each other less often and cannot pass the burden of balancing to anyone else. **Waltz called it the most stable structure — and twelve years later it dissolved.**
- **The live question. Counting poles is a coding decision.** Change the codebook and polarity changes with no event occurring in the world.

Class 4, slide 7, in one line: a theory is not a list of causes but a claim about *which* causes carry the weight. Waltz's achievement is not that he found anarchy — everyone knew about anarchy — but that he made it do explanatory work on its own.

The security dilemma: how good intentions produce arms races

If you take one mechanism from tonight, take this one. It is the engine that makes realism a theory rather than a description — and it is running in four theaters as we speak.

THE SECURITY DILEMMA · A LOOP WITH NO EXIT



The Anglo-German naval race of 1898–1912 is the standard illustration: every dreadnought answered by another, and neither country safer.

- **The definition.** A state arms to increase its own security and thereby reduces its neighbors'; they arm in reply; all end less safe — **with no one having intended harm.**
- **Why it cannot be talked away.** Capabilities are observable; intentions are not. Since intentions change overnight and capabilities cannot, prudence obliges you to plan against the capability.
- **The classic illustration.** Britain launched HMS *Dreadnought* in 1906 and made its own fleet obsolete; Germany answered; by 1914 neither was safer.
- **Where it is running now.** The Baltic, the Taiwan Strait, the Korean peninsula — and cyber, where offensive and defensive capabilities look identical from outside. **Jervis: it is distinguishability that arms control depends on.**
- **The variable that governs its severity.** Jervis's *offence-defence balance*: when defensive postures are cheaper and recognizable as such, the spiral slackens; when the advantage lies with striking first, it tightens. This is why verification regimes and force-posture transparency are not sentimentality but engineering.

Theory into practice, tonight's headline version: every rearmament figure on the SIPRI ledger later tonight is a *rational* decision by a government trying to be safer; the aggregate is a continent less safe than five years ago. **That gap between rational parts and irrational whole is realism's greatest contribution to your thinking.**

Defensive, offensive, neoclassical: one paradigm, three answers

Structural realists agree on anarchy and disagree about appetite. The disagreement is not academic housekeeping: it produces opposite predictions about China, and opposite advice about Ukraine.

ONE PARADIGM, FOUR GENERATIONS

ANCIENT AND EARLY MODERN

Thucydides • Kautilya • Machiavelli • Hobbes

Human nature is the cause.

CLASSICAL • THE 20TH CENTURY

Carr, 1939 • Morgenthau, 1948 • Kennan

Interest defined as power; the amoral state.

STRUCTURAL / NEOREALISM

Waltz, 1979

The *structure* is the cause, not the men.

OFFENSIVE / DEFENSIVE / NEOCLASSICAL

Mearsheimer • Jervis • Walt • Zakaria

How much power is enough? The family quarrel.

Every generation keeps anarchy, self-help and the primacy of the state.

- **Defensive realism** — Waltz, Jervis, Walt. States seek an *appropriate* amount of power. Expansion provokes balancing and is usually self-defeating. Walt's refinement: states balance against **threat**, not raw power.
- **Offensive realism** — Mearsheimer, 2001. Because you can never know how much power is enough, the rational aim is **hegemony**, regional at least. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* predicts that a rising China cannot be accommodated.
- **Neoclassical realism** — Zakaria and Wohlforth. Structure sets the pressures; **domestic politics translates them** — elite perception, state capacity, the ability to extract resources from society, as an *intervening variable*.
- **Why the quarrel matters for method**. Three theories, one paradigm, incompatible forecasts. Lakatos's question from Class 4 applies: are the amendments *progressive*, or do they only protect the core?



Two faces of one capability: the platform that projects force, and the shop floor that makes it possible. Offensive and defensive realism disagree about how much of this is enough — never about whether it counts.

Your test for this discipline, and it is not rhetorical: ask any realist claim you meet this term **which realism** it belongs to. “Realism predicts war over Taiwan” is not a claim until you say whether you mean Mearsheimer, who expects it, or Waltz, who expected nuclear weapons to prevent it.

MOVEMENT III

Realism Against the World

Nine cases, in order, from 416 BC to this year. Some the paradigm explains better than any rival. Some it missed entirely. A school is worth what its record is worth — and the record must include both columns.

CARTHAGE 146 BC • BISMARCK • TRUMAN 1945 • TEHRAN 1953 • GUATEMALA 1954 •
BAGHDAD 2003 • KYIV • THE NSS OF NOVEMBER 2025

A city is destroyed for what it might become

By 149 BC Carthage had no navy and no right to make war. It was destroyed anyway.

THE RATCHET • 201-146 BC

Every demand is met. The last one cannot be. That is the design.

201 BC Peace terms Fleet surrendered; 10,000 talents over fifty years; no war without Rome's consent.	151 BC The debt is paid The last installment, forty years early. Carthaginian commerce thrives again.	150 BC The pretext Raided once too often by Masinissa, Carthage fights back and loses at Oroscopa.
149 BC Demand I • hostages Three hundred children of the leading families. Delivered.	149 BC Demand II • disarm 200,000 sets of armor and 2,000 catapults. Delivered.	149 BC Demand III • the city Leave Carthage; rebuild ten miles inland. Refused — as intended.

146 BC: the city is razed and some 50,000 survivors are sold into slavery.

Polybius, Bk. 38 • Appian. The salting of the fields is a nineteenth-century invention.

- **What realism takes from it.** Anarchy makes *trajectory* a threat. Rome measured Carthage not by what it could do in 149, but by what it might do in 100.
- **Cato, and the sentence against him.** Scipio Nasica argued that a surviving rival keeps Rome disciplined, and lost. **Both arguments are realist.**
- **The modern name for it.** Power-transition theory. Every argument about a rising China runs on Cato's premise: **act while the ratio still favors you.**
- **The historical context, and it is the whole point.** 146 BC is Rome's hinge year. Carthage is razed and **Corinth sacked in the same season**; the western and eastern Mediterranean fall under one power and the sea becomes *mare nostrum*. The Republic that entered the century as one Italian power among several leaves it holding Africa, Macedonia, Achaea and Hispania — **provinces it must now garrison, tax and govern.** The machinery built to survive Hannibal becomes the machinery of empire.
- **And the bill Rome paid for it.** Plunder, tribute and slaves on that scale broke the society that won: latifundia displaced the smallholders who had filled the legions, and within a generation the Gracchan crisis of 133 BC opened the century of civil war that ends the Republic. **Hegemony transformed the hegemon** — a consequence no realist calculation in 149 BC was designed to see.
- **The victor's own verdict.** Watching the city burn, Scipio quoted Homer — “A day will come when sacred Troy shall perish” — and said he feared the same for Rome.

THE THREE PUNIC WARS • 264-146 BC

FIRST Sicily. Rome builds a navy and wins at the Aegates Islands. 264-241 BC	SECOND Hannibal Barca crosses the Alps; Cannae 216; Zama 202. 218-201 BC	THIRD No military threat left. Carthage razed; Corinth falls the same year. 149-146 BC
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A commercial rivalry becomes a hegemonic transition, and then an extinction.

Delenda est Carthago! “Carthage must be destroyed” — Cato the Elder, to the Senate, on every subject. Hannibal, exiled and hunted, took poison in Bithynia c. 183 BC: Rome outlived the man and destroyed the city thirty-seven years later.

Three wars in seven years — then twenty years of restraint

Realism has another name — *machtpolitik*, the politics of force — and the Iron Chancellor is where to look for it. The interesting half of the case is not the wars. It is what he did after winning them.

MACHTPOLITIK, THEN THE BALANCE

Prussia's wars, and the system built to freeze the result.

PHASE I • ACQUISITION BY FORCE • 1864-1871

- 1864** **Denmark**
Schleswig and Holstein taken; Austria made a partner in the spoils.
- 1866** **Austria**
Seven weeks. Austria expelled from Germany — and offered lenient terms.
- 1870-71** **France**
Sedan, then the Empire proclaimed at Versailles. Alsace-Lorraine annexed.

↓ 1871: Germany becomes a satisfied power ↓

PHASE II • PRESERVATION BY ALLIANCE • 1873-1890

- 1873** **Dreikaiserbund**
Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia — keep the three emperors talking.
- 1879** **Dual Alliance**
Vienna bound to Berlin; the axis that will still be there in 1914.
- 1887** **Reinsurance Treaty**
A secret pledge to Russia — the two-front nightmare deferred.

Dismissed March 1890. The Reinsurance Treaty lapses that same June.

- **The doctrine, announced in advance.** To the Prussian budget committee, 30 September 1862: “The great questions of the day will not be settled by speeches ... but by iron and blood.”
- **The instrument.** Three short wars in seven years, each with a defined political objective, each ended before a coalition could form.
- **The restraint, which is the realist lesson.** After 1871 he declared Germany *saturated* and spent two decades building alliances against the encirclement his victories invited.
- **The ethos, and the counterfactual.** “Politics is the art of the possible — the art of the next best.” His successors kept the ambition and dropped the restraint, and arrived at 1914. **Same structure, opposite outcome.**
- **What the map shows, and it is the realist half of the story.** The customs union came first: the *Zollverein* of 1834 knitted the German states into one economy four decades before the Empire existed. **Capability was accumulated before it was cashed** — and Austria, excluded from the tariff union, had already lost the contest for *Kleindeutschland* before Königgrätz was fought.



Central Europe on the eve of unification: **Prussia** in orange, the **Empire of Austria** in red, the other German states between them. Three wars settled which of the two would absorb the middle.

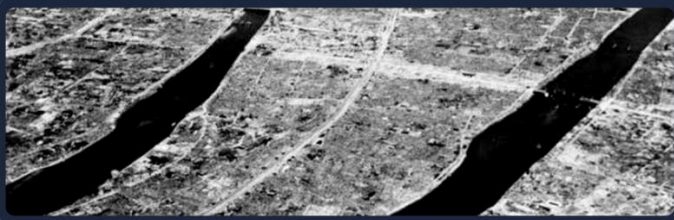
Bridge to practice: Bismarck's rule — take the winnable objective, stop, and consolidate before the balance forms against you — is the most transferable piece of statecraft in this deck, and the one most consistently ignored by powerful states in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The man who founded the United Nations and ordered the bomb

One president signed the Charter of the United Nations, destroyed two cities with atomic weapons, built the American security state and founded NATO. **Realism does not need four men to explain this. It needs one, and the trinomial.**

When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless true.

Truman to Samuel McCrea Cavert, 11 August 1945 — two days after Nagasaki.



Hiroshima from the air, after 6 August 1945.

- **PDNV, June 1945.** The Charter signed at San Francisco: **norms and values** given an institution, a Council and a veto.
- **KFPI, August 1945.** Hiroshima on the 6th, Nagasaki on the 9th. “When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast.” Machiavelli's lion, on White House paper.
- **The machinery, 1947-49.** The **National Security Act** of 1947 — NSC, CIA, a unified defense establishment; the Truman Doctrine; the **Marshall Plan**; **NATO**, April 1949.
- **Berlin, June 1948 – May 1949 — deterrence without a shot.** Stalin closed the land corridors; Truman neither withdrew nor forced them. Some **277,000 flights** supplied a city of two million until the blockade was lifted. **The KFPI column and the PDNV column pointed the same way**, which is the rarest configuration in this deck — and the reason the crisis ended without firing.
- **Why he is the paradigm's best portrait.** Generosity and containment are **one policy described twice**. Judge him and you are doing ethics; explain him and you are doing realism.



Harry S. Truman, 33rd President of the United States, 1945-1953.



United Nations Charter signed 26 June 1945, in force 24 October 1945.

The question for tonight, and it has no comfortable answer: the Charter forbids the threat or use of force; the bomb that made the Council's guarantor credible was dropped six weeks after it was signed. Is the order built on the norm, or on the weapon that stands behind it?

The school that got it right and was not listened to

The popular caricature has realists as the war party. In 2003 the opposite happened, in public, over signatures — and it is the best evidence in this course that the paradigm is analytical rather than belligerent.

THE NEW YORK TIMES • 26 SEPTEMBER 2002 • PAID ADVERTISEMENT

War with Iraq Is Not in America's National Interest

Saddam Hussein is a murderous despot, but no one has provided evidence that he would use weapons of mass destruction unprovoked. Even if he acquired nuclear weapons, he could not use them without suffering massive U.S. or Israeli retaliation. The United States would win a war against Iraq, but Iraq has military options — chemical and biological weapons — that Serbia and Afghanistan lacked. Occupation would require a large and costly commitment of American forces for many years.

SIGNED BY THIRTY-THREE SCHOLARS OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, AMONG THEM:

Kenneth N. Waltz · John J. Mearsheimer · Stephen M. Walt · Robert Jervis · Robert A. Pape · Barry R. Posen · Stephen Van Evera — who paid for it themselves

- **The advertisement.** *The New York Times*, 26 September 2002: “**War with Iraq Is Not in America's National Interest,**” signed by thirty-three scholars of international security and paid for by them.
- **The argument, in realist terms.** Deterrence and containment were working; occupation would be long and costly; and **Iran** would be the regional beneficiary of destroying its rival.
- **Why it is a genuine test.** Ex ante, dated, attributed and falsifiable — from the school most often accused of retrospective wisdom. And nothing came of it: **being right is not a mechanism of influence.**
- **The Global South reading.** Taught in Washington as a policy failure. Read from Baghdad or Brasília it is a precedent about who may authorize force.

For your own presentations: this case is the strongest available answer to the student who asks why we study a paradigm that sounds cynical. Realism's cynicism about *motives* repeatedly produces caution about *wars*. That is not a small public service.

Mearsheimer's claim and the strongest case against it

No contemporary debate divides realists from everyone else — and from each other — as sharply. Handle it as a methodological exercise, not a loyalty test.

ONE EVENT, TWO EXPLANATIONS

The methodological question: which level of analysis carries the weight?

THE STRUCTURAL CLAIM

Mearsheimer

The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (2001)

Level of analysis: system

- NATO enlargement 1999, 2004, and the Bucharest declaration of April 2008
- Great powers do not tolerate rival alliances on their border
- The Monroe Doctrine is the American precedent
- Prediction on record before the outcome — 2014, and again in 1993 on Ukrainian nuclear disarmament

THE REBUTTAL

Snyder

The Road to Unfreedom (2018)

Level of analysis: state & person

- No NATO membership was ever offered; no timetable existed
- Structure permits; it does not order. Someone chose the date
- The stated war aims were historical and civilizational, not defensive
- Finland and Sweden joined in 2023–24 with no reaction

Ask not who is right, but what evidence would settle it.

Works cited. Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001 — and “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (September–October 2014): 77–89. Snyder, Timothy. *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018.

- **The claim.** Mearsheimer, *Foreign Affairs*, September 2014: “**Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault.**” A sphere-of-influence logic that reads identically in Moscow and in Washington’s own hemisphere.
- **The evidence against, and it is strong.** It removes agency from Ukraine entirely — the smaller state appears only as terrain — and it cannot explain the *timing*, the annexation of territory, or the ideological content of the war aims.
- **Where the paradigm splits.** Offensive realists read Russia as a rational balancer; defensive realists read the invasion as self-defeating expansion that produced exactly the encirclement it feared. **Same paradigm, opposite verdicts, same evidence.**
- **The state of the case, August 2026.** A 32-hour Easter truce on 11–13 April collapsed, with Kyiv alleging 469 Russian violations. Ukraine now spends **40% of its GDP** on defense — \$84.1bn, the seventh-largest military budget on earth.

The Class 4 discipline, applied here tonight: state the counterfactual out loud. *If NATO had ruled out enlargement in 2008, would there have been no invasion?* Whatever you answer, name the evidence that would embarrass you — and notice that no archive now open can settle it.

Two elected governments and the cheapest instrument of all

Ten months apart, a superpower removed two governments that had won elections and threatened no one militarily. Both had touched a foreign-owned asset. **This is the realist case that realists least enjoy making.**

ONE TEMPLATE, RUN TWICE

Ten months apart, on two continents, with the same architecture.

TPAJAX

TEHRAN • AUGUST 1953

TARGET

Mohammad Mosaddegh, prime minister

TRIGGER

Nationalization of Anglo-Iranian Oil, 1951

COVER STORY

Communist penetration

OUTCOME

Shah restored; 26 years of monarchy

ADMITTED

CIA acknowledged the role in 2013

PBSUCCESS

GUATEMALA CITY • JUNE 1954

TARGET

Jacobo Árbenz, elected 1950

TRIGGER

Decree 900 — 400,000 acres of United Fruit land expropriated

OUTCOME

Árbenz resigns 27 June; exile; dies 1971

AFTER

36 years of civil war, some 200,000 dead

Neither state threatened the United States militarily.

Both altered the ownership of an asset inside a claimed sphere.

KFPI explains the decision. It does not license it.

- **Tehran, August 1953.** Mosaddegh had nationalized Anglo-Iranian Oil in 1951. Operation **TPAJAX** restored the Shah. The CIA acknowledged its role only in **2013**.
- **Guatemala City, June 1954.** Árbenz's Decree 900 expropriated some 400,000 idle acres from United Fruit, at the value the company had declared for tax. Operation **PBSUCCESS** forced his resignation on 27 June.
- **What the KFPI column explains.** Both were weak, adjacent to a preponderant power, and had altered ownership inside a claimed sphere. **Cost, proximity and precedent account for both without reference to values.**
- **What the PDNV column records.** Twenty-six years to 1979 in Iran; thirty-six years of civil war in Guatemala. **Realism predicts the act and is silent on the bill.**
- **A note on the two names.** **TPAJAX** and **PBSUCCESS** are not acronyms or misprints but CIA *cryptonyms*: a two-letter country digraph plus a codeword — **TP** for Iran, **PB** for Guatemala. The declassified record uses no other name for either operation.

US National Security Strategy (Trump Doctrine): an analysis

Theory usually has to be read into state behavior. Occasionally a government writes it out — and this is the plainest statement of realist premises in an American public document since 1823.

DOCTRINE MAPPED ONTO THE PARADIGM

Left: what the document says. Right: the concept it restates.

“a timeless truth of international relations” — on the influence of larger and stronger nations

PREMISE 7

unequal KFPI → kratological hierarchy

“reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine” — to restore preeminence in the Western Hemisphere

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

the hemisphere as a closed system

“rejects the ill-fated concept of global domination” — but must prevent the domination of others

BALANCING

defensive abroad, offensive at home

“propping up the entire world order like Atlas” is over; allies must spend far more of their GDP

BURDEN-SHIFTING

alliances priced, not assumed

“without imposing on them democratic or other social change”

SEIN, NOT SOLLEN

no theory of what states ought to be

- **The ontological claim, in the government's own words.** *“The outsized influence of larger, richer, and stronger nations is a timeless truth of international relations.”* Premise 7, issued as policy.
- **The sphere, named.** *“The United States will reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere.”* The document calls this the **Trump Corollary**.
- **The burden shifts.** *“The days of the United States propping up the entire world order like Atlas are over.”* **The doctrine and the 2025 ledger are the same fact.**
- **Why the Corollary is not new.** Guatemala 1954 was the Monroe Doctrine executed covertly. **What changed in 2025 is that it is written down.**

National Security Strategy of the United States of America

November 2025



*National Security Strategy of the United States,
November 2025 · released 4 December 2025 · 33 pp.*

READ THE FULL DOCUMENT <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

What a realist would insist on before you applaud or condemn: a doctrine is a *declaration*, not an explanation. The test is whether behavior changes where the document says it will and not elsewhere. **Take one region it does not mention and check it in a year.**

Multilateralist realism and coercive consensualization

The sharpest realist reading of the United Nations does not call the institution powerless. It calls it a *venue* in which the distribution of KFPI is converted into decisions that look consensual.



Guerra and Paz — Candido Portinari, 1952–56; given to the United Nations by Brazil in 1957 and hung at the General Assembly entrance in New York.

- **The term. Multilateralist realism** (2007): the Council must be read through the *manufacture of consensual decisions* in the light of hegemonic power.
- **The dependent variable.** Why did the Council become an organ for the **conservative maintenance of world order**, when the Charter makes it responsible for peace and security?
- **The argument.** When the leading power's high-politics interests align with the other permanent members', the Council is effective. When they do not, it reveals the underlying game. **Its performance is a function of alignment, not legitimacy.**
- **Coercive consensualization.** Mandates, reform of composition and extension of operations all follow this logic. **Consensus is an output of pressure, not evidence of agreement.**
- **Why this belongs in a realism class.** Realism applied where it is usually assumed irrelevant — inside the flagship institution of liberal order, theorized from outside the P-5 itself.
- **The reform question, and why it never moves.** Enlargement is itself a KFPI problem: no permanent member has an interest in diluting the instrument that makes it permanent. **Institutions freeze at the distribution of power that created them** — which is why the Council of 2026 still reflects the settlement of 1945, and why Brazil, India, Japan and the African Union press a claim that the arithmetic of the veto cannot concede.

Theory meets the ledger: the security dilemma itemized

Realism's most testable prediction is that anarchy plus threat produces armament regardless of regime type or good intentions. Here is the audit.

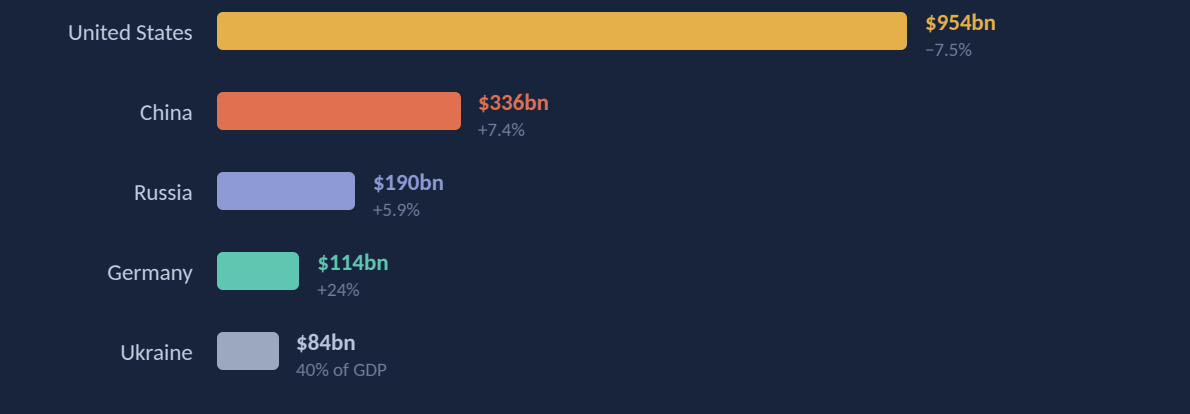
THE REALIST PREDICTION THAT CAME TRUE

World military expenditure, 2025 — the eleventh straight year of growth.

\$2.89 trillion

+2.9% in real terms

2.5% of world GDP — highest since 2009



Europe: \$864bn, up 14% — the sharpest rise since the Cold War.

Asia and Oceania: \$681bn, up 8.1%. Japan at its highest share of GDP since 1958; Taiwan up 14%; India \$92.1bn.

SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, released April 2026 (figures for 2025).

- **The headline.** \$2,887 billion in 2025 — up 2.9% in real terms, the eleventh consecutive annual increase, and **2.5% of global GDP**, the highest since 2009.
- **Concentration.** The United States, China and Russia together spent **\$1,480bn — 51% of the world total**. Three states, half the planet's military expenditure.
- **Europe's turn.** \$864bn, up **14%** — the sharpest annual growth since the Cold War ended. Germany up 24% to \$114bn; Spain up 50%.
- **Asia's turn.** \$681bn, up 8.1% — the largest rise since 2009. Japan at 1.4% of GDP, its highest share since **1958**. Each figure is rational; the aggregate is a region arming against itself.
- **The realist claim this supports.** Not that leaders are aggressive — most of these budgets are explicitly defensive. It is that **defensive intentions are invisible from outside**.



The ledger has three faces: **the factory** that builds it, **the fair** that sells it, and **the world's armies** that field it — armour, artillery and infantry far more than aircraft. Every line of the chart opposite is bought as defense and read abroad as capability.

Four things the paradigm structurally cannot explain

A school is only as strong as its account of its own failures. These four are not debating points; they are the standing objections that the next eight sessions of this course are built on.

CHANGE

It cannot explain transformation

Anarchy is treated as a constant, so genuine systemic change is invisible: 1991, decolonization, the European Union, the abolition of the slave trade. A theory built to explain *recurrence* is blind to what is new.

COOPERATION

It underpredicts durable cooperation

Relative-gains logic says institutions should be thin and temporary. The World Trade Organization, the European Union and eight decades of nuclear arms control are all more durable than the theory allows. **Class 6 opens here.**

IDENTITY

It takes interests as given

Interests are assumed, never explained. But why is a nuclear Britain unthreatening to France and a nuclear Iran intolerable? Wendt's answer — *anarchy is what states make of it* — is the constructivist opening we reach in November.

STANDPOINT

It universalizes one experience

Built from the European great-power record and then applied everywhere. For most states most of the time the operative reality is not the balance of power but dependency, debt and asymmetry — the Global South critique of Class 12.

The fair verdict, and the one this course will hold to: realism is **necessary and insufficient**. No account of international politics that ignores force, power and interest is serious; no account that includes only those three can explain the world we actually live in. The KFPI–PDNV dialectic is a way of saying exactly that.

Realism runs through the format you will use

What I am asking of you from next week: six questions, in this order. Here they are answered about tonight's school.

QUESTION	REALISM'S ANSWER
1 • What exists?	Sovereign states, unequal in capability, in an anarchy with no court of appeal. Everything else — institutions, law, identity — is derivative.
2 • What does it claim?	The seven premises. States pursue survival through KFPI; the distribution of KFPI produces a kratological hierarchy; war is an instrument of politics.
3 • How does the cause work?	The security dilemma. Capabilities are visible and intentions are not, so prudent arming by one produces insecurity in another, and the aggregate is worse for all.
4 • What is the evidence?	Best: Carthage, the Thirty Years' War, Bismarck, Truman, the 2025 spending record. Worst: 1991, the durability of the EU, and every weak state that refused to submit.
5 • Does it still work?	Conditional forecast: <i>if</i> Ukraine remains unresolved and the Taiwan Strait stays contested, European and Asian military spending will rise again in real terms in 2026. Check it in April 2027.
6 • What would change your mind?	A sustained great-power alignment against a rising state's <i>values</i> rather than its capabilities; or a decade of falling defense budgets under intact threat. Neither is in sight.

Questions 5 and 6 decide the grade. Questions 1–4 can be assembled by anyone who has read the chapter. 5 and 6 require you to commit.

Closing the realist frame

CONCLUDING REMARKS · SIX PROPOSITIONS

- Realism is ontological: a claim about what exists, not a preference about what should.
- Its category is the trinomial KFPI, and its counterpoint is PDNV.
- Anarchy means no court of appeal, not chaos; self-help follows from it.
- Classical realism explains by human nature, structural realism by the shape of the system.
- Its record is mixed: superb on 146 BC, on 1635 and on the 2025 ledger; blind on 1991.
- Necessary and insufficient — which is why it comes first, and why it is not the last word.

DISCUSSION · TAKE THESE INTO THE ROOM

- If realism explains the Thirty Years' War better than any rival, what would a case look like that it explains worse than every rival?
- Take Guatemala in 1954. Write the KFPI column and the PDNV column, and say where the behavior landed.
- **From the Global South:** is realism a description of the system, or is it the ideology of those who benefit from describing it that way?

*"A day will come when sacred Troy shall perish."
— Homer, quoted by Scipio at Carthage, 146 BC*

Bridge to Class 6 · Idealism and Liberalism, 28 September. Tonight the sword was the only thing that made covenants more than words. Next week: the tradition that says Hobbes was wrong.

For Class 6: Burchill et al., ch. 3 (Liberalism) · Doyle (1986), "Liberalism and World Politics" · Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (1795) — free via the course library at maltaconsulrecife.eu/unf.php