

INR 6607 • GRADUATE DISCIPLINE • MAIA PROGRAM • UNF

International Relations Theory

The opening block of the discipline — **Classes 1, 2 and 3**: the phenomenology of International Relations, the theory of the state, and kratology, the theory of power.

Fall 2026 • Mondays 6:00–8:45 PM • Building 51, Room 1101

DR. THALES CASTRO

Adjunct Professor, Political Science & Public Administration Department

College of Arts & Sciences | University of North Florida - UNF

Address: 1 UNF Drive, Building 51 Room 2112 Jacksonville, FL 32224

Emails: n01691164@unf.edu | thales@cognitrends.com

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/thales-castro-bb4443/>

Faculty Bio: <https://webapps.unf.edu/faculty/bio/N01691164>

Political Science & Public Administration



EPIGRAPHS

“

All things are subject to interpretation.
Whichever interpretation prevails at a
given time is a function of **power** and not
truth.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Fittingly, the wording is itself a contested paraphrase from the notebooks — the claim enacts its own thesis. It opens the road to Class 3 and kratology.

“

All the world's a **stage**, and all the men and
women merely players; they have their
exits and their entrances.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE · AS YOU LIKE IT

The oldest statement of the international as scenario — a stage of entrances and exits, with no author and no script. It opens the framing question of Class 1.

Together they frame the whole opening block: the world offers itself as a stage to be interpreted — and which interpretation prevails is itself a question of power.



Three movements of the opening block

The professor-led introduction to the discipline is a single argument in three movements: first we ask how the international *appears* to us at all, then we anatomize its principal unit, and finally we interrogate the currency in which the whole field trades.

I

Phenomenology of International Relations

CLASS 1 · MON 17 AUG

How the international *gives itself* to thought. Theory: role, scope and limits. Maps and standpoint. Historical epochs and world-order analysis.

*Framing question: is world politics best read as **scenario, system, society** or **community**?*

II

Theory of the State in International Relations

CLASS 2 · MON 24 AUG

The formal and the substantive state; sovereignty and recognition; taxonomy of states by institutional framework; non-state actors; levels of analysis.

*Framing question: is the state a **juridical fiction**, a **social relation**, or both at once?*

III

Kratology — Theory of Power in International Relations

CLASS 3 · MON 31 AUG

Power defined and disputed; its forms and currencies; elements, indices and measurement; **polarity and laterality**; spheres of influence and hegemonic transition.

*Framing question: is power a **possession**, a **relation**, or a **structure**?*

The through-line: each movement supplies what the next one presupposes — you cannot theorize the state without first settling how the international appears, and you cannot theorize power without a unit that holds it.

The full map: where this deck sits in the semester

CLASS	DATE	TOPIC	CORE READING	PRESENTER
1	Mon 17 Aug	Phenomenology of IR — what a theory is; its role, scope and limits; epochs and world-order analysis	Brown & Ainley, chs. 1–2	Professor
2	Mon 24 Aug	Theory of the state — formal and substantive; sovereignty, recognition, taxonomy, levels of analysis	Brown ch. 3 · Burchill ch. 1	Professor
3	Mon 31 Aug	Kratology — theory of power; elements and indices; polarity and laterality; hegemonic transition	Morgenthau · Clausewitz I.I · Sun Tzu	Professor
—	Mon 07 Sep	No class — Labor Day, university closed	—	—
4	Mon 14 Sep	IR methodology: theory and reality; abstraction and practical knowledge	Brown chs. 4–5 · Burchill chs. 1–2	Professor
5	Mon 21 Sep	Realism: classical and neorealist	Burchill ch. 2 · Morgenthau · Melian Dialogue	Professor
6	Mon 28 Sep	Idealism and liberalism; international law, diplomacy	Burchill ch. 3 · Kant · UN Charter	Professor
7	Mon 05 Oct	International Political Economy; Marxism; globalization and deglobalization	Burchill ch. 5 · Brown chs. 8–9	Students
8	Mon 12 Oct	The English School: international society, order and justice	Burchill ch. 4 · Bull chs. 1–3	Students
9	Mon 19 Oct	Critical theory	Burchill ch. 6 · Cox (1981)	Students
10	Mon 26 Oct	Postmodernism and poststructuralism	Burchill ch. 7	Professor
11	Mon 02 Nov	Critical constructivism	Burchill ch. 8 · Wendt (1992)	Students
12	Mon 09 Nov	Postcolonial theory, with the Global South foregrounded	Acharya (2014) · Brown ch. 10	Students
13	Mon 16 Nov	Green theory and ecopolitics, with analytical eclecticism	Burchill ch. 10 · Sil & Katzenstein	Students
—	Mon 23 Nov	No class — Thanksgiving break, university closed	—	—
14	Mon 30 Nov	Course synthesis and exam review	Shared running notes	Professor
Exam	Mon 07 Dec	In-class essay examination, full class period	—	All

Classes 1–3, in gold, are the opening block covered by this deck. All readings are digital and free.

Three components, one standard

40%

Presentation & class leadership

Three classes each, from Class 5 onward. A structured 30–40 minute presentation, a live 2026 case, a Global South angle, guiding questions, and a one-page handout circulated by 11:59 PM on the Saturday before.

40%

In-class essay exam · 7 December

Closed book, full class period, four prompts of roughly 500–850 words each. A study guide is distributed two weeks in advance; the shared running notes are a permitted preparation resource.

20%

Participation

Preparation and substantive engagement in every class — in the chair and out of it. In a group this small, consistent presence is the precondition, not the bonus.

THE FOUR EXAM PROMPTS — VISIBLE FROM DAY ONE

Foundational genealogies

Trace a modern school to Sun Tzu, Machiavelli or Kant: what is inherited, transformed, silently abandoned.

Comparative analysis

Adjudicate between two schools on one conceptual problem — anarchy, interest, order.

Global South critique

Reconstruct a canonical position from a non-hegemonic vantage point; name the implicit geography of the original.

Praxeological application

Apply a school to a live phenomenon — and identify what it structurally cannot account for.

Every slide in this deck is written to feed one of those four prompts. The full class-by-class map of the term is on slide 4.

What to read and where to look the world up

CORE TEXTBOOKS · FREE PDF

Brown & Ainley, *Understanding International Relations* (3rd ed.) — chs. 1–3. **Burchill, Linklater et al.**, *Theories of International Relations* (3rd ed.) — ch. 1.

Free at maltaconsulrecife.eu/unf.php

PUBLIC DOMAIN · PROJECT GUTENBERG

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* · Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, esp. Bk. V · Machiavelli, *The Prince* · Hobbes, *Leviathan* · Clausewitz, *On War*, Bk. I ch. 1 · Kant, *Perpetual Peace*.



CANONICAL & ARTICLES

Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* — the six principles and the power chapters · Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, chs. 5–8 · Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, chs. 1–3 · Cox (1981), by DOI via the UNF Library.

GENERAL WEB RESOURCES · VERIFY EVERY FIGURE BEFORE YOU PRESENT

Course library — Consulate of Malta

Both textbooks and all course materials, free.
maltaconsulrecife.eu/unf.php

IndexMundi

Country profiles and comparisons of CIA, World Bank and UN data.

indexmundi.com

CIA World Factbook

Area, population, government, economy, military.

cia.gov/the-world-factbook

Global Firepower Index

Annual PowerIndex across sixty-plus factors.

globalfirepower.com

United Nations

Charter, treaties, Council and Assembly documents, UN data.

un.org · treaties.un.org · data.un.org

Lowy Global Diplomacy Index

Every state's embassies and missions — diplomatic reach.

globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org

Our World in Data

Long-run open datasets and reproducible charts.

ourworldindata.org

Passport power indices

Visa-free access as a proxy for standing.

henleyglobal.com/passport-index

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Thales Castro, PhD

Adjunct Professor · Political Science & Public Administration · College of Arts & Sciences · University of North Florida



PRINCIPAL WORK



FUNAG · 2nd ed. · 578 pp.

- Dean for International Relations at the Catholic University of Pernambuco (UNICAP), Recife, Brazil.
- Tenured Professor at UNICAP, 2000–2024; BA *cum laude* and MA, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; doctorate in Political Science, UFPE, with research at UN Headquarters, New York.
- Research and teaching: IR theory, multilateralism, the United Nations system, diplomatic history and Brazilian foreign policy.
- Author of *Teoria das Relações Internacionais* (FUNAG, 2nd ed., 2016) – a systematic IR theory monograph used in Brazilian graduate programs and in preparation for the diplomatic service – and of *Conselho de Segurança da ONU: unipolaridade, consensos e tendências* (2007).
- Lectures delivered in Brazil, Latin America, North America, Europe and Asia.
- Honorary Consul of the Republic of Malta in Brazil.
- CEO and Founder of COGNITRENDS Global Strategic Intelligence, LLC – www.cognitrends.com

CONTACT & OFFICE HOURS

EMAIL

n01691164@unf.edu
thales@cognitrends.com

OFFICE HOURS

Mondays 3:30–5:45 PM
Bldg 51 (PSPA), Room 2112

ADDRESS

1 UNF Drive, Bldg 51
Jacksonville, FL 32224

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PART I · CLASS 1 · 17 AUGUST

Phenomenology of International Relations

How the international appears to thought — what IR is, what theory is and does, what it cannot do, and how the world has been pictured and ordered across the modern era.

TWO WORDS · THREE DEFINITIONS · FOUR FUNCTIONS · THE FRAMING QUESTION · MAPS & STANDPOINT · EPOCHS & WORLD ORDERS



A working definition – and three ways to draw the boundary

THE FIELD AS HUMAN DRAMA · ROURKE

Rourke reads world politics as a global drama produced by the political, economic and social fragmentation of the world – “a cast of national actors often at odds with one another.” They are frequently at peace and capable of cooperation and humanity, and they are also full of ambition, self-serving righteousness and greed. The drama deserves our careful attention.

John Rourke, International Politics on the World Stage, 5th ed. (Guilford: DPG, 1995), pp. 5–6.

THE WORKING DEFINITION OF THIS COURSE · CASTRO

An autonomous science of political epistemic root which describes, explains, predicts and prescribes the multidimensional interaction of the various international actors in the macro-, meso- and micro-systemic spheres.

Six commitments in one sentence: IR is **autonomous, scientific**, rooted in **political** epistemology, has **four functions**, studies **many kinds of actor**, and works across **three levels**.

NARROW

States, war and peace

Diplomacy, alliances, force. Puts high politics first; leaves out most of what happens between wars.

BROAD

All cross-border transactions

Trade, institutions, migration, ideas. Puts interdependence first; leaves out the asymmetry of force.

RADICAL

Globalization and global society

Start from the global whole; admit the state only when it earns its place. Puts structures first; leaves out agency.

Definitions are never innocent. A textbook on ants can define ants; the social sciences cannot. The boundary you draw decides what counts as evidence and which theories can even get started – so we settle the definition at the *end* of study, not at the start.

Reflective thought — and the puzzle that founded the field

Theory, at its simplest, is **reflective thought** — thinking in depth and abstractly about something. We theorize precisely when the answer is *not* obvious. A good theory selects what matters, connects it, and travels beyond a single case.

We do not theorize why people run out of a burning building. We might theorize why someone runs in — to rescue a stranger.

— Chris Brown with Kirsten Ainley, *Understanding International Relations*, 3rd ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), ch. 1

- The nineteenth century treated war as a **rational, legitimate instrument** — a cost-benefit calculation inherent in sovereignty.
- By 1913 a celebrated argument held that interdependent economies had made conquest **unprofitable**. It was right about the costs — and 1914 happened anyway.
- That impossible fact is where twentieth-century IR theory is born — and 1945 is where it is institutionalized: the United Nations, the Bretton Woods system and nuclear deterrence are all answers to the same question, posed twice.

1914

The Great War inaugurates a century of industrial warfare — and the discipline is founded in 1919 to answer it.

How could something so predictably ruinous happen at all?

1945

The end of the Second World War: San Francisco, Bretton Woods and the nuclear age build an order on the ruins of the first answer.

What kind of institution could make it not happen again?

The two governing dates of the modern discipline: 1914 sets its question, 1945 sets its architecture.

Interdependence did not prevent 1914 — and has never guaranteed peace since

WORLD EXPORTS AS A SHARE OF WORLD OUTPUT · 1870–2024



Illustrative long-run orders of magnitude; series definitions differ between sources.

- **The first globalization was real.** By 1913 trade, capital and migration were more integrated than ever before — and the leading argument of the day concluded that war had become economically irrational.
- **The prediction failed.** The curve collapses after 1914 and again in the 1930s. Interdependence raised the price of war; it did not remove the decision to fight.
- **The second globalization is far deeper** — and has plateaued since the 2008 crisis. Whether it is now unwinding is one of the live empirical questions of the term.
- **The methodological lesson.** A theory that was right about costs was still wrong about behavior. Getting the mechanism right is not the same as getting the outcome right.

Keep the question open: if the 1913 peak was followed by thirty years of catastrophe, what does the plateau after 2008 tell us — and what would count as evidence either way?

Four functions, three questions, four limits

THE FOUR FUNCTIONS · CASTRO

- **Describe** — name and map the phenomenon; build the categories that make it visible.
- **Explain** — identify causes and mechanisms: why *this* outcome and not another.
- **Predict** — calibrated, conditional anticipation; never point forecasts of unique events.
- **Prescribe** — guide practice and policy: theory re-entering the world it studies.

THE THREE QUESTIONS

- **Explanatory — why did it happen?** Causes and mechanisms; the dominant mode in American political science.
- **Normative — what ought we to do?** Whether to fight, intervene, obey, admit. Ethics is built in.
- **Interpretive — what does it mean?** Understanding, not only measuring.
- They interlace: a single question about war can call on all three at once.

THE FOUR LIMITS

- **Underdetermination.** The same evidence supports rival theories; the counterfactual cannot be run.
- **Reflexivity.** Deterrence theory helped build the arsenals it studied.
- **Ethnocentrism.** A parochial vantage point universalizes itself unnoticed.
- **Indeterminacy.** 1989 and 2020 were forecast by no one.

CAUTIONARY TALE · 1939–41

A rigidly Leninist theory told Stalin that capitalist Germany was driven only by material need. He appeased Hitler and discounted the 1941 invasion warnings. A monolithic theory, not a plural one, led him badly astray.

THE RULE THAT FOLLOWS · AND COX'S WARNING

Do not enroll in a theoretical army: identifying with one paradigm is a decision for the *end* of study. And remember that theory is always *for* someone and for some purpose — there is no view from nowhere.

Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders," Millennium 10(2), 1981, pp. 126–155.

Scenario, system, society, or community?

Naming the international is the first theoretical act. Each name smuggles in a worldview — and therefore a school. We return to this question in every class of the term.

SCENARIO · CENÁRIO

A stage of contending powers

A theatre of actors, interests and force, with no script and no author. Contingency, prudence, the world *as it is*.

Register: Machiavelli · *Sein* · realism

SYSTEM · SISTEMA

A structure of interacting units

Units whose behavior is shaped by the distribution of capabilities among them. Structural, mechanical, modelable.

Register: neorealism · Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (1979)

SOCIETY · SOCIEDADE

An anarchical society

States conscious of common interests and bound by shared rules and institutions — order without government.

Register: the English School · Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (1977)

COMMUNITY · COMUNIDADE

A moral community of persons

Shared values and obligations running across borders to individuals — the world *as it ought to be*.

Register: Kant · *Sollen* · cosmopolitanism

The great dichotomy behind the four names: realism reads the world as it is (*Sein*, Machiavelli's register), idealism as it ought to be (*Sollen*, Kant's). The discipline lives in the tension between the two, and analysis goes wrong whenever that tension is dissolved — when the world is treated as nothing but necessity, or as nothing but moral aspiration. **Exercise:** narrate one 2026 headline four times, once under each name; the facts will not move, but the causes and the remedies will.



*Cooperative and friendly relations
(positive sum game)*



*Conflicting and competing relations
(zero sum)*

Every map encodes a standpoint



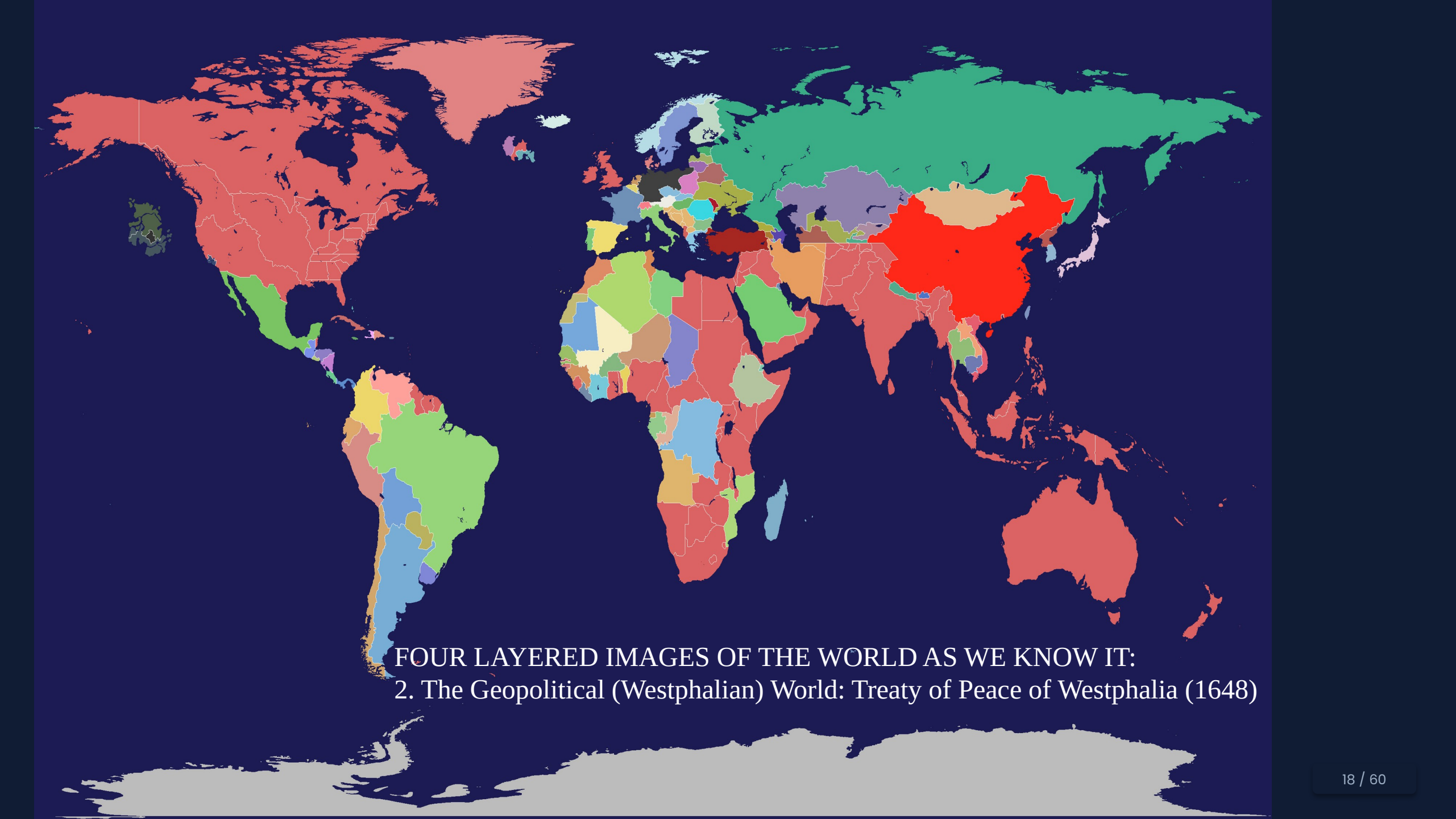
Double-hemisphere world map of the late seventeenth century — the cartography of the Westphalian moment.

- **A map is an argument.** Projection, center, orientation and color are choices, and each decides what looks large, central and normal — and what looks marginal.
- **Read the frame, not only the coastlines.** This one surrounds the world with allegories of the continents and classical deities: knowledge of the world presented as the possession of one civilization looking outward at the others.
- **The blanks are political.** Coastlines are precise where trade and navies had reached; interiors are empty where they had not — and emptiness on a map has always been an invitation.
- **The lesson for theory.** Definitions work like projections: they can preserve some relationships faithfully only by distorting others. No projection is neutral.

The question we keep asking: whose world is centered, and whose is margin? Read the same system from Brasília, Lagos or Jakarta and the theory changes.



FOUR LAYERED IMAGES OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT:
1. The Geographic World: Natural boundaries and geomorphologies



FOUR LAYERED IMAGES OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT:
2. The Geopolitical (Westphalian) World: Treaty of Peace of Westphalia (1648)

GLOBAL ECONOMIC GROWTH OUTLOOK: 2026



FOUR LAYERED IMAGES OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT:

2. The Geoeconomic World: Globalization, financial transactions and world trade dynamics



CYBER DIGITAL WORLD MAP

Made with AI



FOUR LAYERED IMAGES OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT:

4. Key issues: cyber threats, cryptocurrencies, IOT, AI and digital integration

Six orders, and the dates that separate them

1648–1815	1815–1914	1914–1945	1945–1991	1991–2021	2021–now
Westphalian order	Concert of Europe	The world wars	Cold War	Unipolar order	Emerging complex order
sovereignty + dynastic alliances	consultation + balance	collective security, unenforced	deterrence, blocs, spheres	US primacy + institutions	competition + hedging

ORDER	ERA	DISTRIBUTION	ORDERING MECHANISM	FATAL STRAIN
Westphalian	1648–1815	Many powers	Sovereignty plus shifting dynastic alliances	Dynastic and revolutionary war
Concert of Europe	1815–1914	Five powers	Great-power consultation and conscious balance	Nationalism; alliance rigidity
The world wars	1914–1945	Unstable	Collective security without enforcement	Absent hegemon; unanswered aggression
Cold War	1945–1991	Two blocs	Deterrence, blocs, tacit spheres	Imperial overstretch (USSR)
Unipolar order	1991–2021	One hegemon	US primacy plus dense institutions; liberal expansion	Overreach; the rise of challengers
Emerging complex order	2021 → now	Contested	Great-power competition plus minilateral hedging	The rules themselves are contested

Two governing dates and one hinge. 1914 poses the question, 1945 builds the architecture — and the fall of Kabul in **August 2021** closes the thirty-year unipolar moment: the sole hegemon withdrew, and a new complex order began to form around competition, hedging and contested rules.

Closing the phenomenological opening

FIVE PROPOSITIONS

- The discipline has no self-evident object; defining it is already theorizing.
- Theory describes, explains, predicts and prescribes — and is always for someone.
- Explanatory, normative and interpretive questions interlace in every real problem.
- Every map — cartographic or conceptual — encodes a standpoint.
- Orders are undone by the strains their own ordering mechanisms produce.

DISCUSSION · TAKE THESE INTO THE ROOM

- Which of the four names — scenario, system, society, community — best fits world politics in 2026, and what does your choice commit you to?
- Name one thing the conventional definition of IR renders invisible that you consider central.
- Which of the six orders does the present most resemble, and on what evidence?
- **Read once more from the Global South:** from Brasília, Lagos or Jakarta, is 1648 the founding date of the system — or is 1492, or 1885, or 1960?

Bridge to Class 2: every one of these propositions presupposes a unit that acts. Next week we ask what that unit actually is — in law, in sociology, and in the practice of recognition.

PART II · CLASS 2 · 24 AUGUST

Theory of the State in International Relations

The discipline spent its first half-century theorizing relations *between* states while borrowing its concept of the state, unexamined, from law and sociology. This class examines it.

FORMAL & SUBSTANTIVE · SOVEREIGNTY · RECOGNITION · TAXONOMY · NON-STATE ACTORS · DIPLOMATIC DYNAMICS · LEVELS

*Flags, capitals, national currencies,
cultural history, political institutions,
governments, state sovereignty,
economic might, military capacity and
geopolitics make up important aspects
of the anatomy of this complex and
fascinating political body called the
world*



The four elements of sovereignty and statehood

DOMESTIC

Authority within

How public authority is organized inside the territory, and how effectively it controls what happens there.

INTERDEPENDENCE

Control of flows

Regulating movement across borders — people, goods, capital, data, pathogens. The most eroded of the four.

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL

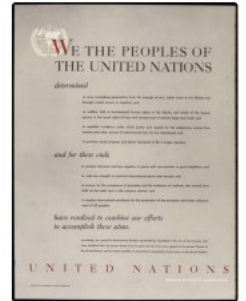
Mutual recognition

The status conferred by others: treaties, seats, immunity, standing to sue and be sued.

WESTPHALIAN

Exclusion of external authority

Non-interference. Routinely traded away — IMF conditionality, EU law, and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P, UN World Summit Outcome, 2005).



UN Charter, 1945 — Art. 2(1): sovereign equality

STATE

A juridical-political apparatus over a territory: objective, recognizable, countable — roughly 193 UN members plus a contested fringe.

NATION

A community bound by shared identity — an *imagined political community*, imagined as limited and as sovereign.

NATION-STATE

The fusion of the two — historically rare, often violent to achieve, and normatively privileged since 1919. Most states are not one.

The verdict often given — 'organized hypocrisy': sovereignty has never been the empirical condition the textbooks describe. It is a norm honored selectively, invoked instrumentally, and violated by consent as often as by force. That does not make it unreal; it makes it *political*.

The state in law, and the state in fact

FORMAL · THE LEGAL-DIPLOMATIC VIEW

A legal person

- **The classical three elements:** a territory, a people, and an effective public authority over both.
- **The Montevideo criteria** (1933, Art. 1): permanent population, defined territory, government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states — the fourth is what makes the definition *international*.
- **Legal equality.** UN Charter Art. 2(1): one vote each in the General Assembly for Tuvalu and for China.
- **Its strength:** it explains why statehood is sticky — Somalia kept its seat through decades without an effective government. **Its blind spot:** it cannot say why Taiwan, which meets every criterion, is not a state.

SUBSTANTIVE · THE SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW

A social relation

- **Weber** (*Politik als Beruf* / "Politics as a Vocation," 1919): a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. Note every word — *claims, successfully, legitimate*.
- **Contractarian:** Hobbes ends the war of all against all; Locke makes authority revocable. Two answers to one question — why obey?
- **Historical:** war made the state and the state made war. Power *over* society is old; the capacity to act *through* it is the modern achievement.

HOW THE TWO MACRO-THEORIES DIVIDE THE WORK

The **formal** aspect of the paradigm refers specifically to the **constitutive elements** of the state — territory, population, government, international capacity. The **substantive** aspect assesses the **quality of its governance and institutions** — whether rule is effective, legitimate and administratively real. Neither answers the other's question, and the gap between them is where the next slide lives.

Proto-state, quasi-state, failed state

Legal personality and effective governance do not always travel together; three named conditions describe the mismatch.

PROTO-STATE · PRE-SOVEREIGN

An emergent political entity that governs a population and territory and is building state institutions *before* any recognition. Partial and unstable control, emerging administration, no legal personality; sovereignty is an aspiration, not a status.

Commonly cited: the American colonies before 1776 · early medieval Italian city-states · Kurdish structures before the KRG · Donetsk and Luhansk, 2014–15.

QUASI-STATE · SEMI-SOVEREIGN

An entity that **possesses some attributes of sovereign statehood but lacks others** — especially full international recognition, effective internal governance, or complete control over its territory. It *looks like* a state in some respects, but not enough to count as a fully sovereign member of the international system.

Commonly cited: Kosovo · Somaliland · Northern Cyprus · Abkhazia and South Ossetia · the State of Palestine — and, in Jackson's sense, post-colonial states with juridical but thin empirical statehood.

FAILED STATE · SOVEREIGN BUT HOLLOW

A fully recognized sovereign state whose central authority has lost the capacity to perform core functions: the monopoly of legitimate force, territorial control, revenue collection, basic public services and law. The seat, the flag and the treaties survive; the governance does not.

Commonly cited: Somalia after 1991 · Libya after 2011 · Yemen · Haiti · the eastern DRC. The label is contested: it describes symptoms as essences, and has been used to license intervention.

CATEGORY	TERRITORIAL CONTROL	INSTITUTIONS	RECOGNITION	SOVEREIGNTY
Proto-state	Partial, unstable	Emerging	None	Aspirational
Quasi-state	Significant but incomplete	Functional but limited	Partial or contested	Weak or constrained
Failed state	Lost or fragmented	Collapsed or captured	Full	Formal only
Consolidated state	Full	Mature	Full	Complete

Proto-states are **pre-sovereign**; quasi-states **semi-sovereign**; failed states **sovereign in law, absent in fact**.



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF REFLECTION ON
THE 1994 GENOCIDE AGAINST THE
TUTSI IN RWANDA

APRIL 7



TIME

SUBSCRIBE



WORLD

Somalia: Warlords, Pirates and the Politics of Morass

ADD TIME ON GOOGLE

by [Nick Wadhams](#)

DEC 15, 2008 12:00 AM ET



28 / 60

Armed fighters from the al-Shabab group travel on the back of pickup trucks outside Mogadishu in Somalia. Farah Abdi Warsameh / AP

Statehood recognition: the political-diplomatic act governed by international law

Recognition of a *state* is in practice permanent; of a *government*, revisable. UN admission (Charter Art. 4) is the nearest thing to a collective decision.

ENTITY	POSITION	WHAT IT TESTS
Taiwan (ROC)	Formal ties with 11 UN member states plus the Holy See (2026); extensive unofficial relations	Meets every Montevideo criterion and is still not a state in law — statehood is conferred, not merely achieved
State of Palestine	Recognized by roughly 157 of 193 UN members; UN non-member observer state since 2012	Overwhelming recognition without effective territorial control — the mirror image of Taiwan
Kosovo	Recognized by around 100 states; admission blocked at the Security Council	Whether remedial secession exists in law, and whether the ICJ's 2010 opinion settled anything
Somaliland	No general recognition; functioning government since 1991	Effectiveness without recognition; the African Union's commitment to inherited colonial borders
Western Sahara (SADR)	AU member; recognized by a substantial minority of states	A recognized <i>people</i> with a pending self-determination process and no effective territory
Abkhazia · South Ossetia · TRNC	Recognized by a handful of patrons	Patron-dependent statelets: recognition as the projection of one great power's preference

Self-determination. Charter Art. 1(2) and the 1960 Declaration made it a right — but confined it in practice to colonial peoples within inherited administrative borders (*uti possidetis*). Secession outside that frame remains, deliberately, unresolved in law. Counts vary between trackers; treat all figures as approximate for 2026.

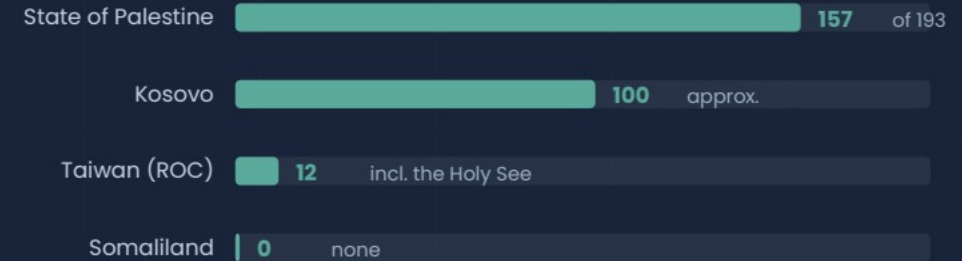
Statehood is produced, and recognition is distributed

UN MEMBER STATES, 1945–2026



The membership almost quadrupled in eighty years. Two surges do the work: decolonization from 1955 to 1975, and the dissolution of the Soviet and Yugoslav federations after 1991. Statehood is not a natural fact — it is created in identifiable political moments.

RECOGNITION IS NOT BINARY · STATES RECOGNIZING, 2026 (APPROX.)



Four entities, four positions on a continuum. Recognition is a quantity distributed by other states, not a property an entity either has or lacks — which is why the formal and the substantive theory of the state must be held together.

Counts vary between trackers and shift with each announcement; treat as approximate for 2026 and verify before citing.

Classifying the unit

AXIS OF CLASSIFICATION	TYPES	WHY IT MATTERS FOR IR
Form of state	Unitary · federal · confederated	Determines who may sign what; federated units increasingly conduct their own paradiplomacy
Form of government	Republic · monarchy	Shapes succession, continuity of policy and the symbolic repertoire of legitimacy
System of government	Presidentialism · parliamentarism · semi-presidentialism	Determines veto players and treaty ratification — the two-level game of domestic and external bargaining
Regime type	Liberal democracy · electoral democracy · hybrid · authoritarian · totalitarian	The independent variable of democratic-peace theory and audience-cost arguments

BY CAPABILITY · POSITION IN THE HIERARCHY

Superpower / great powers — global reach across every domain. **Middle powers** — insufficient to impose, sufficient to broker; the natural constituency for multilateralism. **Small states** — leverage through law, alliances, neutrality and niche specialization. **Micro-states** — sovereignty as an exportable asset, and one vote in the General Assembly.

BY CAPACITY · EFFECTIVENESS OF RULE

Consolidated · weak · fragile · collapsed · de facto entities. Capacity is a continuum, not a switch: fragility is measured in degrees of administrative reach, revenue and legitimacy — see the previous slide for the proto-, quasi- and failed conditions this axis produces.

North and South: the other classification



Socioeconomic regionalization — países do norte and países do sul, the line drawn without regard to hemisphere.

- **A second taxonomy, cutting across the first.** Territorial form and regime type sort states by their institutions; North and South sort them by position in the world economy.
- **The line is analytical, not geographic.** Australia and New Zealand sit south of the equator and north of the line; the category tracks industrialization, income and structural position — not latitude.
- **It is the map of dependency theory.** The Latin American tradition reads the world as center and periphery: terms of trade, technological dependence, and the arrested development they produce.
- **And it is contested.** Emerging economies, Gulf states and BRICS+ strain a binary drawn in the 1970s — but the objection it registers has not gone away.

Why it belongs in a theory of the state: juridical sovereignty is distributed equally, and everything else is not. Whether the sovereign-equality norm emancipates or contains the South is a question this course will keep open.

Non-state actors and transnational forces

INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

UN, NATO, EU, WTO, IMF, World Bank, BRICS+. Created by states, yet possessing legal personality, bureaucratic interests and agendas of their own.

MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

Semiconductors, energy, cloud infrastructure, asset managers. Balance sheets larger than most national budgets, and control of chokepoints no ministry commands.

NGOS & ADVOCACY NETWORKS

Red Cross, Amnesty, Human Rights Watch. They set agendas, monitor compliance and supply the information on which state reputations turn.

ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS

Insurgencies, militias, cartels, maritime disruptors. Low-cost imposition of high costs — the asymmetry state-centric models systematically underprice.

INDIVIDUALS & EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES

Financiers, technology founders, diasporas and expert networks that define what counts as a problem before any state chooses a policy.

SUB-STATE & PARADIPLOMATIC UNITS

Provinces, federated states and global cities negotiating investment, climate and migration arrangements directly — Pernambuco and Florida included.

~300

intergovernmental organizations with a permanent secretariat

40,000+

international NGOs active across borders

~60,000

multinational corporations, with far more subsidiaries

1 in 2

of the hundred largest economic entities is a firm, not a state

The test question for any actor: does it hold resources, autonomy from state direction, and the capacity to alter outcomes? If yes, it belongs in the analysis — whatever its legal personality. Figures are orders of magnitude; definitions and counts vary by source.

What is diplomacy?

The management of relations between states by dialogue rather than force — the institution through which recognition becomes routine, and through which sovereignty is exercised one conversation at a time.

- **Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961).** The five functions of a mission (Art. 3): represent, protect nationals and interests, negotiate, ascertain and report, promote friendly relations.
- **The grammar of accreditation.** *Agrément* before appointment; letters of credence; precedence and the *doyen*; *persona non grata* (Art. 9) — the sanction that needs no justification.
- **Inviolability** of premises (Art. 22) and of the diplomatic agent (Art. 29): the reciprocity on which the whole system rests, and which even hostile states rarely breach.
- **Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963).** A separate, more functional track — protection of nationals, documentation, commerce. Consular relations may survive the rupture of diplomatic ones; **honorary consuls** (ch. III) project presence where an embassy is unaffordable.
- **The unofficial track.** Where recognition is withheld, states invent substitutes: trade offices, interest sections, protecting powers, liaison bureaus. Taiwan's global network is the largest example — a complete diplomatic apparatus that formally is not one.



Bid me discourse, and I will enchant thine ear.

– **William Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis***

The diplomat's whole craft in one line: where force compels, discourse persuades. Recognition is a credential presented on a specific afternoon; sovereignty is an immunity someone declines to waive.

Diplomatic Hierarchy

Some positions may not occur in smaller missions



Ambassador
High-Commissioner in Commonwealth missions

Chargé d'affaires

HEAD OF MISSION

Minister

Minister-Counselor

Counselor

MANAGERS
OFFICERS

First Secretary

Second Secretary

Third Secretary

Attaché

Assistant Attaché





The United Nations: multilateral diplomacy in action.



Philosophical question:
The UN is attached to a Machiavellian-Hobbesian
paradigm or to a Kantian viewpoint of the world?

Where should we look for causes?

Waltz's three images (Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, Columbia University Press, 1959; developed in *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley, 1979): before explaining anything, decide at which level the explanation is pitched – and be able to say why.

1

Individual

Leaders, perception, psychology, risk propensity – and the tendency of decision-makers to see what they already expect to see.

Risk: post hoc attribution to personality.

2

State / domestic

Regime type, institutions, bureaucracies, interest groups, ideology – the state read as rational actor, as organizational routine, and as bureaucratic bargaining.

Risk: reductionism.

3

System / structural

Anarchy and the distribution of capabilities. Structure does not determine choices; it shapes and shoves.

Risk: a theory with no agents and no dates.

Two further levels this course adds: the *sub-state* (provinces, cities, firms) and the *transnational / global* (markets, norms, ecology). Neither fits Waltz's trichotomy, and both are indispensable in 2026. **Worked example:** the 2024–26 wave of recognitions of Palestine – leaders spending political capital (1), domestic majorities and diaspora constituencies (2), and a weakening unipolar consensus that made defection cheap (3).

Closing the theory of the state

FIVE PROPOSITIONS

- The state is at once legal person, social relation and historical construct; keep all three in view.
- Sovereignty is four things, not one — and has always been honored selectively.
- Recognition is the political act at the heart of international law; the contested margins are where the theory shows its seams.
- Classification is not bookkeeping: institutional form conditions what a state can credibly promise.
- Choosing a level of analysis is a substantive claim about causation, not a presentational choice.

DISCUSSION · TAKE THESE INTO THE ROOM

- If Taiwan satisfies Montevideo and is not a state, what exactly does statehood consist of?
- Is the "failed state" a diagnosis or an alibi? Who benefits from the category?
- Which non-state actor most constrains your own country's foreign policy this year?
- **Read once more from the Global South:** if juridical sovereignty was extended in 1960 while empirical statehood was not, is the sovereign-equality norm an emancipation or a containment?

Bridge to Class 3: we now have a unit. What it pursues, what it fears, and what it can actually make happen all reduce to a single contested word — which is where kratology begins.

PART III · CLASS 3 · 31 AUGUST

Kratology — Theory of Power in International Relations

Power defined and disputed: its forms and currencies, its elements and indices, the distribution and modes of action it produces — polarity and laterality — and the transitions in which orders are made and unmade.

ΚΡΑΤΟΣ · POSSESSION, RELATION, STRUCTURE · MORGENTHAU · CLAUSEWITZ · SUN TZU · INDICES · POLARITY & LATERALITY · SPHERES · TRANSITION

κράτος + λόγος

Kratology — the systematic study of power: its nature, sources, forms, measurement and transformation. If IR has a master concept, this is it: every school in this course is, at bottom, an answer to the question of what power is and where it resides.

GREEK

κράτος *kratos* — effective dominion.

δύναμις *dynamis* — capacity, potential.

ἐξουσία *exousia* — authorized competence.

βία *bia* — sheer force.

ἀρχή *arche* — rule, and origin.

LATIN

potentia — raw capacity to act.

potestas — power vested by office and law.

auctoritas — the weight that persuades without commanding.

imperium — the right of command.

Rome's distinction between *potestas* and *auctoritas* is the ancestor of every modern argument about legitimacy.

GERMAN

Macht (Weber) — the probability of imposing one's will within a social relationship, *despite resistance*.

Herrschaft — settled domination that no longer needs to impose, because it is obeyed as a matter of course.

The passage from *Macht* to *Herrschaft* is what hegemony names.

WHY IT MATTERS

English collapses all of this into one syllable. Much of the field's confusion is lexical: two scholars agree that "the US is powerful" while meaning *potentia* and *auctoritas* — then disagree about everything that follows.

Working rule: whenever you write "power," say which one you mean — capacity, relation, authority, or domination. Naming the concept is already half the analysis.

What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

— William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II.ii

*The world is dictated by the Capital of Force,
Power and Interests (K_{FPI}) of National States*

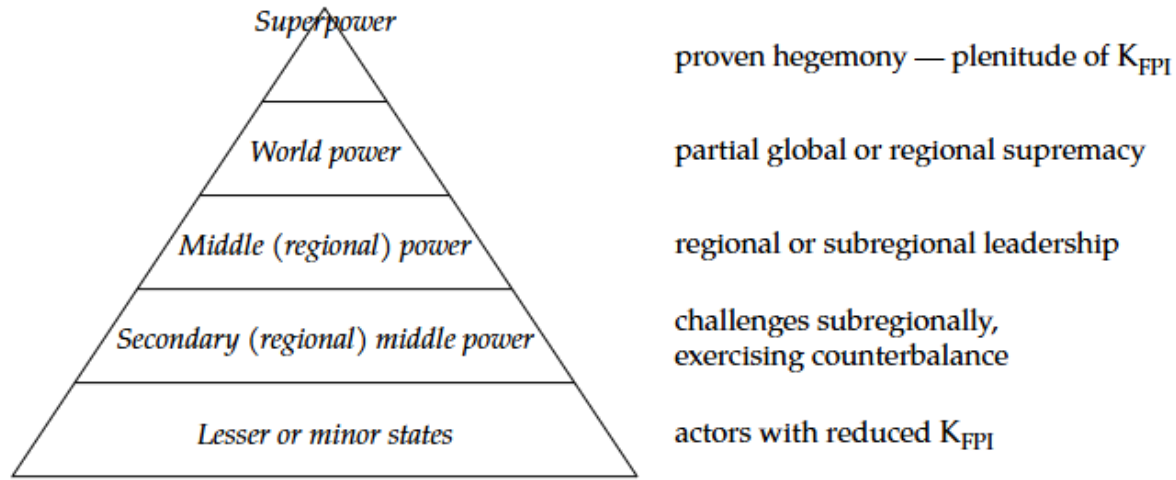
*Morality, utopian idealism, equality, ethical
humanitarianism and other abstract
constructs play a minor role in determining
the outcomes of grand strategies in world
affairs.*

(CASTRO, 2016)



Figure 11

Kratological taxonomy according to Castro's typology



The next two items will detail two great forms of interpreting the dynamic of the emergence and the fall of hegemonic powers with their empires, and of other actors of supremacy and of leadership: the hegemonic cycles, with emphasis upon the political-diplomatic (P_{PD}), military (P_M) and geodemographic (P_G) vectors; and Kondratieff's long-duration waves (*K-cycles*), centered upon the economic-financial vector (P_{EF}), especially in the field of investments. Both interpretative forms are to be described, instrumentally, as complementary and interrelated for understanding the logic of the emergence and the decline of the dominions of the vast empires and of their melancholy twilights.

THALES CASTRO

Theory of International Relations

A Non-Centric Revisionist Framework

Second edition, revised and updated

Complete text: Introduction, Chapters I–VIII and Bibliography

Translated from the Portuguese

Possession, relation, or structure?

POWER AS POSSESSION

Something a state *has*

An aggregate of attributes — territory, population, industry, arms, technology. Countable, comparable, storable. The working assumption of most policy analysis.

But power is exercised, not merely owned. A capability that is never converted into influence over someone, on some issue, changes nothing at all.

Objection: resources are not outcomes.

POWER AS RELATION

Something that happens *between*

A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something B would not otherwise do. Always dyadic, issue-specific and contextual.

Objection: it sees only observable conflict.

POWER AS STRUCTURE

Something that *constitutes*

Structural power: control over the frameworks — security, production, finance, knowledge — within which others must choose. No command is issued; the menu is already set.

Objection: hard to falsify.

The conversion problem — why the strong lose. Between resources and outcomes stand strategy, will, alliance management, legitimacy and tolerance for cost; each can fail independently. Power resources are not money: they are not fungible across issues. Never infer an outcome from a capability ratio alone: ask whether it is convertible *in this domain*, credible *to this adversary*, and sustainable *for this society*.

Four forms of power, four currencies of influence

FOUR FORMS · HOW POWER WORKS

- **Compulsory.** Direct control of one actor over another. *Dyadic* means the relation runs between two identified parties, A and B: A knowingly deploys its own resources — troops, tariffs, sanctions, aid, threats — to change what B does, and the effect can be traced back to A. It is the most visible and most attributable form: someone acts, someone yields, and both can be named.
- **Institutional.** Control exercised at a distance, through the rules and procedures of formal organizations.
- **Structural.** The constitution of actors' capacities and positions relative to one another — core and periphery, capital and labor.
- **Productive.** The generation of meaning and category — who counts as "developed," "rogue," "emerging," "civilized."

FOUR CURRENCIES · HOW POWER IS PAID

*After Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power* (PublicAffairs, 2004) and *The Future of Power* (PublicAffairs, 2011).*

- **Hard.** Inducement and coercion: military force, economic payment, sanction.
- **Soft.** Attraction and agenda-setting: culture, values, perceived legitimacy. Cheap to spend, impossible to stockpile, easily destroyed by conduct.
- **Smart.** The deliberate combination of the two — a strategy claim, not a third resource.
- **Sharp.** Manipulation under cover of openness: information operations, elite capture, the weaponization of the target's own transparency.

Two questions, not two theories. The left column asks *through what mechanism* power works; the right, *in what currency* it is paid. Together they cover most of what the field means by the word — and expose how much of it never appears in a capability index.

Morgenthau's six principles of power at the global level: intro remarks of political realism

Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 1st ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948 (6th ed., rev. K. W. Thompson, 1985), ch. 1.

01

Objective laws

Politics is governed by objective laws rooted in human nature; a rational theory can grasp them, however imperfectly.

02

Interest defined as power

The signpost that lets political realism find its way — and what makes politics possible as an autonomous inquiry.

03

Interest is not fixed

The category is universal; its content is historically variable with time and circumstance.

04

Prudence over moralism

Universal moral principles cannot be applied to state action in abstract formulation. Prudence — weighing consequences — is the supreme political virtue.

05

No nation is providence

The moral aspirations of a particular nation are not the moral laws governing the universe. The realist guard against crusading.

06

Autonomy of the political

The economist asks how policy affects wealth; the lawyer whether it is legal; the moralist whether it is right. The realist asks how it affects power.

Read principles 4 and 5 carefully before calling realism amoral. Morgenthau's target is not ethics but the moral certainty that licenses catastrophe — a lesson he drew, as a refugee from Nazi Germany, from interwar idealism and interwar nationalism alike.

What a nation's power is made of

THE STABLE ELEMENTS

- **Geography.** Position, insularity, depth, chokepoints — the most stable factor of all.
- **Natural resources.** Food self-sufficiency and raw materials; today, critical minerals and energy.
- **Industrial capacity.** Production at scale — visible again in artillery shells and shipyards.
- **Military preparedness.** Technology, leadership, quantity and quality of forces.
- **Population.** Size, distribution and age structure — a slow variable with an iron grip.

THE VOLATILE ELEMENTS

- **National character.** Contested and easily caricatured — his most criticized category.
- **National morale.** The determination with which a society supports its government's policy. It can evaporate in a season.
- **Quality of diplomacy.** For Morgenthau the single most important factor: the art of bringing the other elements to bear.
- **Quality of government.** Reconciling resources, policy and popular support.

The three fallacies of evaluation — still the most useful part of the chapter: the *single-factor* fallacy (geopolitics, militarism or nationalism explaining everything); the *permanence* fallacy (treating today's distribution as fixed); and the *fallacy of the absolute* (forgetting that power is always relative to a specific other).

Victory before battle

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (5th c. BCE); trans. L. Giles, London: Luzac, 1910 (Project Gutenberg); trans. T. Cleary, Boston: Shambhala, 1988.

- **The five fundamental factors.** The Way (moral cohesion between ruler and people), Heaven (timing and conditions), Earth (terrain and distance), Command (the qualities of the general), and Method (organization, logistics, discipline).
- **The hierarchy of strategy.** Attack the enemy's plans first; next his alliances; then his army; besiege his cities last and least willingly.
- **Deception as method.** All warfare is based on deception — the deliberate management of the adversary's perception, which is to say of his decisions.
- **Knowledge.** Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. Intelligence is not an auxiliary to strategy but its precondition.
- **勢 *shi*.** Strategic configuration — accumulated positional advantage that makes the outcome follow almost without effort, like a round stone rolled down a mountain.



Sun Tzu

c. 544 – c. 496 BC

The Art of War · 5th c. BCE

READS INTO IR AS

Deterrence and cost-imposition · intelligence and net assessment · the indirect approach · economic statecraft and chokepoint leverage · gray-zone and hybrid operations · shaping the adversary's decision environment rather than defeating his forces.

THE KRATOLOGICAL POINT

Sun Tzu is a theorist of *structural* power two millennia before the term existed: his subject is not the battle but the configuration that makes the battle unnecessary — power exercised so early it is never seen being exercised.

**“The quality of decision is
like the well-timed swoop
of a falcon which enables
it to strike and destroy
its victim.”**

Sun Tzu

The Art of War



War as an instrument of policy

Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* (Berlin, 1832); *On War*, ed. and trans. M. Howard and P. Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, Book I, ch. 1.

- **The definition.** War is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will — the purest first-face exercise of power there is.
- **Escalation in the abstract.** Three reciprocal actions drive force toward the utmost bound: each side must outdo the other, disarm the other, and match the other's effort.
- **Why real war stops short.** Friction, imperfect information, chance, exhaustion — and above all the political object, which sets the price anyone is willing to pay.
- **The remarkable trinity.** Primordial violence and enmity (the people); chance and probability (the commander and the army); subordination to reason and policy (the government) — a composite that must be held in balance.



Carl von Clausewitz

1780 – 1831

On War · published 1832

War is the continuation of politics by other means.

— *On War*, 1832

FOR THE KRATOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Force is not a domain apart: it is one instrument among several, valued by what it purchases politically — which is why victories that serve no policy are simply expensive.

Julius Caesar

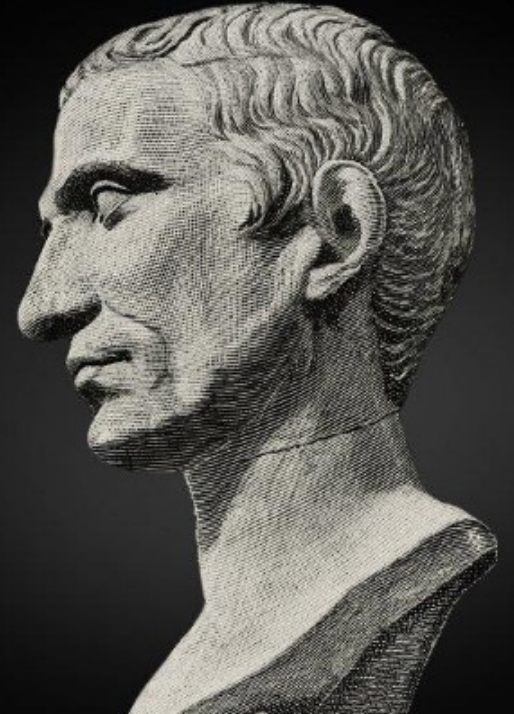


War gives the right to the conquerors to impose any condition they please upon the vanquished.

AZ QUOTES

If you must **break the law**,
do it to seize power:
in all other cases **observe it**.

– *Julius Caesar*



How the discipline tries to count it

INDEX	WHAT IT AGGREGATES	WHAT IT MISSES
CINC (Correlates of War)	Total and urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, military expenditure and personnel, as shares of the system total	Built for the industrial era; blind to technology, networks, finance and legitimacy
GDP — nominal and PPP	Aggregate output; nominal for international purchasing, PPP for domestic mobilization	Says nothing about extractive capacity or willingness to spend
Military expenditure (SIPRI)	Annual defense outlays in constant terms	Inputs, not effectiveness; purchasing power and conscription distort comparison
Global Firepower PowerIndex	Sixty-plus factors — manpower, platforms, logistics, geography, finance; lower is stronger	Conventional-war weighted; nuclear forces and alliances largely excluded
Comprehensive National Power	The Chinese analytical tradition: hard and soft components in a single score	Weightings are analyst choices — the index encodes a theory of power
Soft-power & influence indices	Reputation, culture, education, diplomatic network; Lowy's resources-plus-influence design	Measures perception, which correlates loosely with the ability to obtain outcomes

Every index is a theory in disguise. Choosing what to count, and how to weight it, decides the ranking before the data arrives. Four recurring pathologies: aggregation hides asymmetry; inputs stand in for outputs; alliances vanish because the unit is the state; and small index movements get reported as shifts in world order.

Three primary power credentials

Three brute facts locate a state in the system — each produces a different league table, and no state leads all three.

1 • TERRITORY • TOTAL AREA



Russia, Canada, the United States, China, Brazil — area buys depth and resources, and imposes the burden of defending it.

2 • POPULATION



The world redrawn by people, not land — India and China swell, Russia and Canada shrink: soldiers, markets and taxpayers.

3 • ECONOMY • GDP

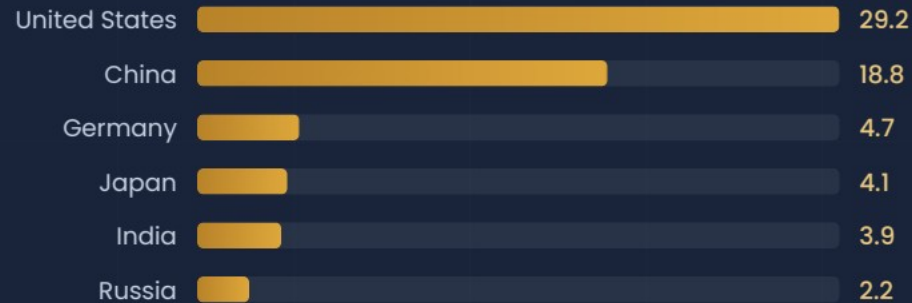


A \$115 trillion world economy at market prices: the United States leads, China follows; at purchasing-power parity the order reverses.

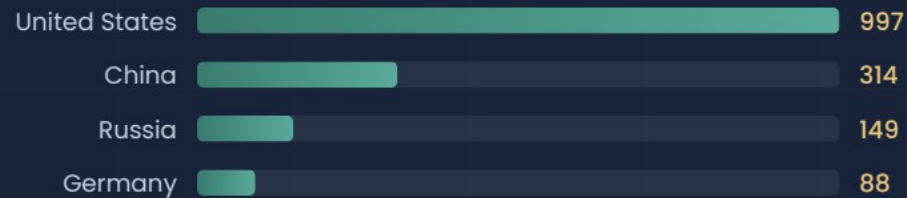
Read the three together: Russia is first in area and eleventh in output; India is first in population and fifth in GDP; the United States leads the economy and is third in area and population. Sources as marked on each graphic.

Who holds material power?

NOMINAL GDP, 2024 · US\$ TRILLION (APPROX.)



MILITARY SPENDING, 2024 · US\$ BILLION (APPROX.)



GLOBAL FIREPOWER POWERINDEX · 2026 · LOWER IS STRONGER

#	COUNTRY	PWRINDX
1	United States	0.0741
2	Russia	0.0791
3	China	0.0919
4	India	0.1346
11	Brazil	0.2374

Read the panels against each other. The economic gap is closing; the military gap is not — and the second is financed out of the first. Note what none of them shows: alliances. Counting the United States with its treaty partners changes the picture more than any single national figure.

Illustrative orders of magnitude on IMF-, SIPRI- and GFP-type estimates. Figures approximate; verify before citation.

Risk maps: measurement as an act of power



Source: Geopolitical Risk Assessment 2025, OceanWize (four-band country rating; methodology and weightings not published with the graphic).

- **Read it as an artefact, not a finding.** Someone chose the variables, the thresholds and the four colors; the map then circulates as a fact about the world.
- **Notice the geography of the palette.** Green clusters where the producers of such indices are based; red covers most of Africa and much of Asia. That is a claim about whose order is normal.
- **The consequences are material.** Risk ratings price insurance and sovereign debt, steer investment and travel advisories, and can help produce the instability they record.
- **This is productive power:** the capacity to fix the categories — developed, emerging, fragile, high-risk — that others must then inhabit.

The kratological question: who has the authority to classify, and who merely receives a color? Ask it of every index in the previous two slides.

Where the poles actually are depends on what you measure

SHARE OF WORLD OUTPUT AT PURCHASING-POWER PARITY · 1980–2024



Approximate shares on IMF-type PPP estimates; the EU series is the current membership carried backwards.

- **On this measure the crossing has happened.** China passed the United States around the middle of the last decade, and the two largest Western blocs have each lost roughly a third of their share since 1980.
- **On other measures it has not.** At market exchange rates the American economy remains far the largest, and in military outlay the gap is close to three to one.
- **Both series are true.** PPP tracks what an economy can mobilize at home — soldiers, steel, shipyards. Market rates track what it can buy abroad — technology, energy, allies.
- **So "is the system multipolar?" is partly a measurement question.** Choose the indicator and you have largely chosen the answer.

Carry this into the next two slides: polarity is not read off the world, it is read off an index — and every index, as we have just seen, is a theory in disguise.

Polarity and laterality

POLARITY · HOW MANY GREAT-POWER CENTERS?

The **distribution of power** in the system.

- **Unipolar** — one dominant pole (the United States, 1991–2021). Free hand; overreach and soft balancing.
- **Bipolar** — two rival poles (US–USSR 1947–91). Clear blocs; rigidity; violence displaced to the periphery.
- **Multipolar** — three or more (Europe 1815–1914). Flexible alignment; ambiguity and miscalculation.
- **There is no apolar world.** Power disperses, it does not vanish: what is loosely called “apolarity” is always a system with several poles and weak rules. Diffusion is a statement about the *rules*, not about the absence of centers.

LATERALITY · HOW MANY PARTIES ACT TOGETHER?

The **mode of action**, and its claim to legitimacy.

- **Unilateral** — one. Maximal autonomy and speed, minimal legitimacy and burden-sharing.
- **Bilateral** — two. Reciprocal bargains; alliances and trade pacts.
- **Minilateral** — a few (3–9). Coalitions of the capable or willing: QUAD, AUKUS, G7.
- **Multilateral** — many. Rule-based and inclusive: highest legitimacy, slowest: UN, WTO, Paris.

The two axes are independent. A multipolar system can be run through multilateral rules or through raw unilateralism; a unipole can bind itself to institutions or refuse to. Structure does not dictate mode — and that gap is where diplomacy and statecraft actually live.

Polarity is descriptive, not deterministic. The modern sequence: emerging multipolar (1648–1815) → multipolar Concert (1815–1914) → unstable multipolar (1919–39) → bipolar (1947–91) → unipolar (1991–2008) → contested (2008–now).

Anarchy's quiet hierarchy

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE · THE MECHANISM

An area in which one power's preferences are expected to prevail and outsiders to defer — enforced less by occupation than by anticipation. Its currency is the veto others exercise on themselves.

Instruments: security guarantees and their withdrawal · buffer states · basing and access · infrastructure and debt · elite ties · energy and payment dependence.

HEGEMONY · THE MATERIALIST READING

Hegemonic stability theory: a preponderant power supplies the public goods that keep an open system running — a currency, open sea lanes, a lender and market of last resort. The classic diagnosis of the 1930s: collapse followed Britain's inability and America's unwillingness to lead.

HEGEMONY · THE GRAMSCIAN READING

Not preponderance but a fit between material capabilities, ideas and institutions that makes one order appear natural and universal. Hegemony is getting others to want what you want — consent at world scale, with coercion held in reserve.

The diagnostic question for 2026: is what we observe a decline of American *capabilities*, of American *authority*, or of the *appetite* to supply the goods? Each has a different remedy, and the three are routinely conflated in public argument.

Global South reading: for much of the world, "the rules-based order" and "a sphere of influence" have described the same experience under two different names. Take the objection seriously before answering it.

Four theories of how orders change hands

MECHANISM 1

Power transition

The system is hierarchical, not flat. War becomes likely when a *dissatisfied* challenger approaches parity with the leading state. Satisfaction, not capability alone, is the key variable.

MECHANISM 2

Rules outlive the distribution

Orders reflect the distribution of power at their founding. Differential growth opens a gap between that distribution and the rules — and hegemonic war has historically closed it.

MECHANISM 3

Long cycles of leadership

Roughly century-long cycles of global leadership — Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain twice, the United States — each inaugurated by a global war and eroded by delegitimation.

THE POPULAR FRAME



The Thucydides trap

THUCYDIDES · c. 460 – c. 400 BC

Sixteen cases of a rising power confronting a ruling one; twelve ended in war. A vivid frame — and contested: case selection, coding and implied determinism have all drawn heavy fire.

What the four share: transition is dangerous not because challengers are aggressive but because *rules made under one distribution outlive it*. **What they underweight:** nuclear deterrence, economic interdependence, and the agency of everyone who is not one of the two protagonists.

US-China: reading one relationship on every axis

AXIS	WHAT IT REVEALS
Possession	An economic gap that is narrowing and a military-spending gap that is not; American depth in alliances, finance and frontier technology against Chinese depth in manufacturing, shipbuilding and critical-mineral processing
Relation	Neither side reliably obtains compliance from the other on its priority issues — tariffs are answered by export controls, and each round demonstrates capability while changing little
Structure	Two competing frameworks under construction: payment systems, standards bodies, development finance, undersea cable and cloud infrastructure. The decisive contest is over whose rails others must use
Forms of power	Compulsory: sanctions, export controls and military signalling. Institutional: agenda control in the WTO, the IMF and the UN system. Productive: rival accounts of development, order and legitimacy addressed to the Global South
Polarity & laterality	Emerging bipolar competition inside a wider multipolar field; American minilateralism (QUAD, AUKUS, chip controls) against Chinese bilateralism plus BRICS+ — with most states declining to choose
Transition	Power-transition logic predicts danger at parity; interdependence and nuclear deterrence cut the other way; the swing variable is <i>satisfaction</i> , not capability

Class exercise: pick one 2026 development in this relationship and specify which face, which form and which currency of power it exemplifies — then say what the standard capability index would have predicted, and why it was wrong.

Closing the theory of power

FIVE PROPOSITIONS

- Power is possession, relation and structure at once; a complete analysis asks all three questions.
- It is paid in four currencies — hard, soft, smart, sharp — and works through four mechanisms: compulsory, institutional, structural and productive.
- Resources are not outcomes: conversion is a skill that fails independently of capability.
- Every index is a theory in disguise; read the codebook before the league table.
- Polarity and laterality are independent axes: do not read a change of *mode* as a change of *structure*. Transitions are dangerous because rules outlive the distribution that made them.

DISCUSSION · TAKE THESE INTO THE ROOM

- Give one 2026 example of *structural* or *productive* power. How would you know if you were wrong?
- If you could keep only one index, which — and what would you be blind to?
- Does the Clausewitzian trinity survive proxies, drones and gray-zone coercion?
- **Read once more from the Global South:** from Brasília, Lagos or Jakarta, is non-alignment a weakness, or the most rational kratological strategy available in a two-pole contest?

Bridge to Class 4: we have named the phenomenon, anatomized its unit and interrogated its currency. The remaining question is epistemological — by what method may we claim to know any of it? That is IR methodology, and it opens the school presentations.