Session 1: What is International Relations?

Course Website: http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/zmaoz/international_relations.htm
International Relations as a field of study covers the factors and processes that affect the interactions among states and non-state actors across national boundaries.

Principal actors in international relations

- **States.** A state is composed of
  
i. A defined territory demarcated by specific boundaries,

  ii. A defined population residing in that territory,

  iii. An integrated set of institutions that is capable of making and enforcing laws over this population (internal sovereignty),

  iv. The recognition by other states of the sovereignty of that state (external sovereignty).
Nonstate Actors. Are actors that (a) share some but not all of the characteristics of states or (b) incorporate two or more states in a new entity

These actors include

- **Substate Actors:** Ethnic groups, terrorist organizations, Diaspora organizations (governments)

- **International Governmental Organizations (IGOs).** Supernational actors composed of formal representatives of states (e.g., the United Nations, NATO, the European Union, The Organization of American States)

- **International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs).** Supernational actors composed of international representation that is not necessarily official (Red Cross, Amnesty International, ILO).

- **Multinational Corporations (MNCs).** Economic firms whose activity spans several states (ITT, Nike, Chevron)
Scope of the Field

Political Science

Geography: Political Geography

Military Strategy

Economics
International Political Economy (IPE)

Law: International Law

History: Diplomatic History
The Intellectual Origins of IR

- Military Strategy—Sun Tsu, Sixth Century B.C.
- Diplomatic History—Thucydides, 420-411 B.C.
- International Law—Hugo Grotious, 16th Century
- Diplomacy—Francois de Cailleres, 17th Century
- Philosophy—Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant (17th-19th Centuries)
The Interrelations between History and Theory in IR

- **Historical starting point of modern IR**—Treaty of Westphalia, 1648. Established the principle of sovereignty as the foundation for relations among states.

- **Up to the late 19th century**—limited focus on the study of IR in academic institutions and scholarly literature.

- **Most political theorists** dealt with IR as a side-kick of domestic politics, or as an appendix of other disciplines.

- **Practice of principal aspects of IR** (war, diplomacy, alignment, international trade) was widespread, but the scientific study of these matters was disconnected and relied on different disciplinary aspects and methodologies.
Two important historical processes provided a strong impetus to the study of IR as an academic discipline separate from other disciplines

• Imperialism in the late 19th century and early 20th century—helped globalize the international economy and solidified the connection between economics and politics

• World War I brought home an awareness of the destructiveness of war, and its social, economic, and political implications. It also highlighted the potential globalization of militarized conflict among states.
Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and the Study of IR

- The Principle of National Self-Determination
- The Principle of Public Diplomacy and Open Agreements—Transparency in IR
- An International Forum for Conflict Resolution—the League of Nations
Empirical Failing: The collapse of the post-WWI world order invoked criticism of both the content of the approach and of its application.

Theoretical Criticism: This approach rests on a number of implicit assumption that are not theoretically sustainable. Human nature is not benign. The state nature is not benign. International arrangements that are not based on intrinsic interests of states are unsustainable.

Normative Criticism. The application of utopian approaches that rest on shaky empirical and theoretical foundations is likely to yield disastrous consequences.
Origins. The collapse of the post WWI world order in the 1930s

Founding Fathers


Realism: Fundamental Assumptions

- States are the principal actors in international relations
- There is a clear and unambiguous separation between domestic politics and international politics
- States can be understood as unitary-rational actors
- States are driven by the wish to advance and protect their national interests that are defined in terms of power
- The international system is anarchic—it lacks a central authority that is capable of making and enforcing laws on states
1. States are the principal Actors
2. IR and domestic politics are separate entities
3. States as unitary-rational actors
4. States seek to maximize their national interest defined in terms of power
5. The international system is anarchic

Deductions
Description: Characterization of processes in international reality

Analysis: Attempts to explain foreign policy decisions, international processes, and systemic change

Prediction: Attempt to account for future events, structures, and processes.

Prescription: Delineation of principles for better decisions and policies at the national and international level
Political Realism and the Cold War

- Effect of scholarship on political behavior in the post-WWII era—the failure to form a collective world order
- Deterrence theory.
- Polarity and international politics
- The evolution of the international political economy
- The gradual collapse of the cold war
Criticism of Political Realism

• **Limited Content.** Realism focuses on national and international security, and on international conflict; it ignores or discounts the more frequent types of international interaction that are cooperative in nature.

• **Partly Valid Assumptions.** Modern IR is characterized by both state and nonstate actors; there are bi-directional influences of domestic and international politics; states are neither unitary, nor universally rational actors; states are guided by complex concerns many of which do not concern power; anarchy describes only the realm of international security but not other aspects of world politics.
• **Complexity.** Realism oversimplifies reality. Modern international politics is more complex and multilayered than what realist theory would have us expect.

• **Interdependence.** International relations are characterized by complex interdependence; relations within one state have major effects on other states. No state—regardless of its power—can uniquely shape all events in the international system. And no state is completely insensitive to what’s going on in its environment.

• **Empirical Criticism.** Political realism failed in predicting major events and processes in world politics. In fact, most of the hypotheses derived from this paradigm have been refuted by empirical research.
The major ideas that formed this paradigm began to take shape in the early 1970s. Key factors that influenced scholars included:

1. The decline of US economic hegemony.
2. The rise in the number and influence of nonstate actors.
3. Increased levels of international cooperation in economics, cultural affairs and science.
4. The evolution of communication and transportation technologies that increased the need for international coordination.
5. Changes in the structure and characteristics of the system
Principal source of the liberal approach:


**Key Assumptions**

- States are not the only important actors in world politics. Nonstate actors matter.
- There are important linkages between domestic structures and processes and international politics
- States are complex conglomerates of actors, institutions, and interests. Thus they are not necessarily rational entities.
- The international system is not completely anarchic. Some domains of international relations are characterized by “international regimes”
International Regime: A set of formal and informal rules, or norms that constrain the behavior of units in the international system and regulate their relations.
International Relations—Complex Interdependence

- NGOs
- Government A
- Government B
- Society A
- Society B
- IGOs
- Domestic Politics
- International Politics
- Substate Actors
Constructivism

• Origins: Philosophy and sociology of knowledge

• Key assumptions
  • Behavior is driven by ideas: states behave on the basis of their understanding of their own identity and of the principles that govern international relations

  • Perception of reality is socially constructed: Key values and ideas about international relations emerge as social conventions

  • States’ experience in the international system defines the manner in which they construct their reality: how states perceive their reality is shaped by the lessons they draw from the interaction with other states
• Implications

• Key constructs in international relations (e.g., anarchy, power, norms) are socially constructed: international anarchy exists only to the extent that it is an ideational convention

• Prevailing shared ideas define international cultures (Hobbesian, Lockean, Kantian): the structure of the system is based on states’ shared beliefs about the rules of international behavior

• Agents (states) and structures (system) mutually constitute each other: ideas shape behavior; behavior shapes ideas.

• Since the structure of the system is a result of shared ideas of states, it is constituted by agents.

• However, since the structure is a function of states behavior and behavior shapes ideas, agents are constituted by structure.