

International Relations

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A Brief History of International Relations (IR)

- Prof. David Davies (1919 - University of Aberystwyth) establishes first chair in IR.
- IR is, therefore, a discipline formed in the aftermath of World War One
- Focused on state-centric forms of conflict (specifically, military conflict)
- Scientific interpretation of the human world
- Understanding, explaining, predicting & prescribing = PREVENTION of conflict
- It is a discipline that relies heavily on competing meta-narratives/theories – many of which have roots that go back centuries or even millennia

Today's Focus is on Nuclear Weapons

- In IR theory, nuclear weapons are primarily seen as defensive weapons;
- States possess nuclear weapons not in order to use them for offensive purposes;
- Rather they are possessed to act as the ultimate deterrence against external aggression;
- This relies on a realist theoretical approach;
- And this position relies on a set of assumptions one makes about the *real* world as follows:

Assumption	Characteristics	Impact on i.r.
Anarchy	The lack of a central governing authority that informs and shapes the behaviour of all actors in any given system (i.e. states in the global system of states)	Absence of the rule of law Security and survival are not guaranteed Security dilemmas Arms races
State-centrism	The state is the only important type of actor in i.r.	Relations between states determine all aspects of i.r. Non-state actors are of secondary importance/influence at best
Sovereignty, Security & Survival	The core interests of all states regardless of other factors such as ideology, religion, history etc.	States are self-interested States focus on their own security and survival And they will pursue their own survival even at the expense of other states' interests/well-being
Power = military power	The way to achieve your goals is to be more powerful than any potential adversaries	Militarisation of states and the pursuit of greater destructive capacities
Human nature = negative	Humans are <i>inherently</i> selfish, untrusting and untrustworthy, aggressive, unkind etc.	Conflict – in all its forms

So, what makes nuclear weapons deter aggression?

The destructive effects of nuclear weapons is so great that the cost of attacking a state that possesses them is so high as to be prohibitive.

This is equally true when both states in any given relationship possess them, with the result being Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) – the ability of the attacker and defender to render absolute destruction on each other.

For realists, MAD represents the ultimate balance of power (or terror!) – where a balance of power leads to stability as no state will attack another that is equally capable.

War, in this view, is caused by imbalances of power where one state's capabilities are greater than another's/others' resulting in low opportunity costs of going to war.

In short, states will take advantage of other states' weakness if given the chance.

Role Playing Exercise

Brief: you are decision makers (or the policy advisers who they listen to)

Policy in question: to pursue nuclear weapons or not

Framework of analysis: as in previous slides - if you adopt this theoretical position which of the following would you advocate?

Policy Options:

- A. Advocate the proliferation of nuclear weapons.
- B. Maintain the status quo of nuclear weapons capabilities (with a select few states possessing them, and all others being prohibited from pursuing them by international law).
- C. Pursue the eradication of all nuclear weapons and the creation of a nuclear weapons free world.

