

GLOSSARY

This glossary contains an explication of key technical terms with meanings which are specific to International Relations theory. If a concept is characterized by multiple, contested meanings, the variety of meanings is introduced.

Abandonment. When an ally abandons a military or diplomatic alliance and, thereby, the commitments constituting the core of the alliance. Prior to World War II, France abandoned its alliance with Czechoslovakia. The United Kingdom, fearing entrapment, did not support France's commitments. See also **entrapment**.

Agent–structure problem. A meta-theoretical problem concerning the dilemmas analysts face when prioritizing either agents (actors) or structures. See also **structuration theory**.

Alliance. A formal agreement or coalition between two or more states to cooperate in military or security matters. Military alliances often play a role in **balance of power** politics. Liberal theorists regard alliances as an example of international institutions.

Anarchy. Absence of political authority. The international system is anarchical as there is no higher political authority (e.g. no world government); states are fully sovereign entities. According to English School theorists, the anarchical society can be an orderly society; according to liberal theorists, anarchy can be moulded, hence for them it is a matter of degree, not of kind. See also **hierarchy**.

Balance of power. A key concept among especially realist and English School theorists; characterized by several meanings. For some it refers to a condition of an almost mechanical power equilibrium between states. Others assume that balances between states are created by state leaders. Still others see it as an inherent feature of international politics, i.e. beyond the will of state leaders. Reflections on balance of power might be used by decision-makers as a rational basis or justification for a given foreign policy. Critics of the concept emphasize that the numerous meanings of the concept diminish its analytical utility in studies of international relations. See also **balance of threat**.

Balance of threat. A version of **balance of power** theory. However, theorists claim that it is not power per se that tends to be balanced. It is the degree of threat a state assigns to a given opponent power.

Balancing. When a state or an alliance consciously balances military opponents, i.e. engages in **balance of power** politics. Some make a distinction between hard and soft balancing. It is contested whether soft balancing can take place within **alliances**.

Bandwagoning. When weaker powers align with the stronger power rather than opposing it by means of **balancing** (for instance, by means of forming an **alliance**).

Bilateralism. Bilateral relations are relations between two states. Bilateralism refers to the web of such relations. See also **unilateralism** and **multilateralism**.

Bipolarity. A structural concept referring to a systemic distribution of power, specifically when there are only two great powers (or superpowers) in the international system. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union constituted a bipolar structure in the international system. The contemporary international system is considered **unipolar**, or, increasingly, **multipolar**.

Buck-passing. Refers to a pronounced reluctance to counter a given emerging threat while hoping that other states will do something about it. When encountering the emerging Nazi Germany, the Western powers passed the buck to one another. President Truman is said to have a sign on his desk, 'The buck stops here', meaning that there was no one further up to refer an issue to.

Chain-ganging. Similar to a chain reaction; states are chain-ganged into war by alliance partners, since alliance commitments force states into war even if they have no special interest in the war in question. By contrast, see **buck-passing**.

Civil society. A classical concept within political philosophy, denoting an intermediate realm between the state and the individual; the network of societal institutions, e.g. political parties, free markets, trade unions, non-state

media, interest groups, NGOs, etc. Totalitarian states are characterized by an almost complete absence of a civil society.

Classical approach. Also called the traditional approach – a mode of thinking about international relations emphasizing the role of international law, diplomatic history and philosophy, in contrast to behaviouralist approaches which employ the language of variables, propositions, formal hypothesis testing and frequently also the use of statistical analysis.

Communitarianism. Political, philosophical and ethical stance emphasizing the common origins of moral codes and individual identities; in international relations associated with nationalism, respectively with the idea of a pluralist international society; communitarians perceive the nation-state as the primary site of moral obligations and as the primary limit to the expansion of the moral community. In contrast, see **cosmopolitanism**.

Convention. Agreement or jointly accepted principle of action; solution to recurrent coordination games; an arbitrary equilibrium.

Cosmopolitanism. A term derived from the Greek word *kosmopolites*. Philosophical approach outward in orientation and avoiding local and ethnocentric prejudices; initial expression of cosmopolitanism attributed to Diogenes, who proclaimed himself to be a 'citizen of the world'. Definitions of cosmopolitanism vary, yet principles of individuality and universality are core elements. In international relations cosmopolitanism is linked to liberalism and the argument that no morally significant boundaries separate human beings.

Defensive realism. Strand of realism whose theorists assume that states strive for an 'appropriate' or sufficient amount of power. Moreover, they stress that seeking superior power is not a rational response to external systemic pressures. According to defensive realists the prime strategy for survival is balancing against those states which are increasing their relative power.

Democratic peace theory. Argues that spread of democracy will lead to greater security as democratic states tend not to fight other democratic states. Instead democracies are believed to settle mutual conflicts of interests without the use of threat or force since internal shared norms and institutions matter. Democratic peace theory is based on a Kantian logic stressing the three elements of republican democratic representation, transnational interdependence and ideological commitment to human rights.

Deterrence. Psychological effect on an opponent resulting in a decision not to take some action, such as attacking or starting a war; achieved either through fear of disciplinary punishment or through rational calculation that pursuing this action will not lead to the accomplishment of the intended objectives or respectively that the involved costs will be too high.

Diplomacy. The process or the art of communication among states (or their representatives) in international politics; the tools of diplomacy include positive inducements, persuasive tactics, compromise, threats and coercion. Diplomacy in foreign policy relates to a state's political or policy element in conducting its foreign relations.

Double standards. Refers to equal cases being treated differently; or that a state demands from others what it would never dream about delivering itself. See also **exceptionalism**.

Duty. The duties of states are often called 'deontology'. Within the same family of terms, we find notions such as obligation, responsibility and commitment.

Entrapment. The process of being dragged into a conflict over an ally's interests that one does not share, or only shares to some degree; entrapment occurs when states value the preservation of an alliance more than the costs of fighting for the ally's interest.

Epistemology. Derived from the Greek word *episteme* meaning knowledge; refers to theories of knowledge and the question of how we come to know what we think we know about the world; denotes a pursuit that leads us to adopt various methods/methodologies for testing our propositions of theoretically derived expectations.

Exceptionalism. Political reasoning according to which a given state is exceptional, for which reason double standards are all right; the state is definitely beyond comparison.

First image. In the three **levels of analysis** format, first-image theories focus on explanations situated at the level of individuals/human nature. Causes of conflict are seen in the intervention of governments nationally and

internationally disturbing the natural order. Determinants of peace are individual liberty, free trade, interdependence and prosperity. See also **second image and third image**.

First-order theory. Substantive theories about international relations; theories which can be applied in empirical studies; see also **second-order theory**.

Game theory. A mathematical interaction theory that has been widely applied in a range of scientific disciplines, including economics, political science and international relations. Being mathematical, it is a form of theory that is as formal as it probably gets. The theory concerns strategic interaction among rational players and assigns paramount importance to preferences and outcomes.

Geopolitics. Study of the influence of geographical factors on politics and state behaviour, dealing with the question of how location, population, climate, natural resources and physical landscape determine a state's foreign policy options as well as its position in the hierarchy of states.

Hegemony. Refers to a system regulated by a dominant leader; to relations of dominance with a major power exercising hegemony over countries within its sphere of influence; to control, power or influence used by the leading state over other states.

Hierarchy. A system that is characterized by higher and lower levels of political authority; national political systems and empires are hierarchical. Realist power transition theorists regard the international system as hierarchical. See also **anarchy**.

Identity. Relates to the question: 'Who am I or with whom do I identify?' In International Relations the answer is sometimes linked to terms of identification with a nation which may/may not be associated with a state; thus, identity can be transnational, cf. the examples of religious, gender or class identification. Some theorists focus on state identity, i.e. the key characteristics a state has or wants to be recognized for.

Imperialism. In its classic meaning a position of superiority or dominance with regard to foreign territories; a policy of acquiring foreign territory through force, especially associated with the establishment of colonies staffed by personnel (administrators, military troops, missionaries) from the imperial country during the 19th century, known as colonialism.

Institutionalization. Refers to the expansion of international law and the significant increase in the number of international institutions as well as their scope. According to neoliberal institutionalism, the degree of systemic institutionalization tempers the effects of anarchy and influences the scope of cooperation and conflict.

Interaction capacity. Relates to physical and social technologies determining possibilities for transportation and communication within any social system. The use of aeroplanes during World War I increased interaction capacity significantly and blew the roof off the nation-state.

Interdependence. A situation whereby actions or events in one state or part of the world affect people elsewhere; interdependence exists only when there is a degree of mutual dependence or reciprocal ties among the parties concerned. Interdependence is frequently *asymmetric*, i.e. one party is more affected than the other; thus, it can exist among states or involve other actors, such as *transnational* companies, organizations or individuals, with means of interaction that overcomes boundaries of states and their societies.

Interests. These represent that which is of importance to a unit, e.g. a state, a class, a group or an individual, and usually include, as a minimum, its survival. *National* interest relates to matters of importance to a state; it can be defined in more or less narrow terms and in more or less contrast to common interests.

International community. References to the international community often have legitimizing functions, for instance when a powerful coalition of states claims that 'the international community' cannot accept the behaviour of state X. The coalition could have said 'we' but that would connote self-interest rather than common interest. Sometimes, the United Nations is seen as embodying the international community.

International governmental organizations. Multilateral institutions set up by states to pursue common objectives that usually cannot be achieved by means of unilateral or bilateral action (reduction of transaction costs), cf. the United Nations, WTO or International Labour Organization (ILO). Members of international organizations are states which distinguishes them from **transnational** or **non-governmental organizations** (NGOs).

International institutions. A generic term comprising international organizations, regimes and conventions.

International law. Refers to laws which transcend borders and apply to states (international law narrowly conceived), individuals (natural persons as in international humanitarian law) or to organizations and corporations (legal persons, for instance in international business law). Sources of international law are **conventions** and **treaties** which bind states to these formal agreements even when their contracting governments change.

International regime. An international agreement comprising sets of rules and principles agreed by states in order to coordinate and manage their relations in a particular issue area. Some regime rules have the binding character of international law while others are informal yet followed by states because they make many frequent transactions a habit or are perceived as generally being in the state's self-interest. Examples include international monetary regimes and international export control regimes, e.g. the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

International society. A key concept in English School theory, an association of member states interacting across international orders, sharing common purposes, organizations and standards of conduct; also referring to a global social framework of shared norms and values based on state sovereignty as political independence is a core value of an international society.

Intervention. Interference in internal affairs of another state through diplomatic, military, economic or other means. English School solidarists explain humanitarian military interventions by reference to human security concerns and the growth of solidarist norms.

Just war. A theory stating the conditions under which states may go to war rightfully (*jus ad bellum* – justice of war), for instance with just reason, as in self-defence in response to aggression; refers also to waging war by using means that are proportional to the ends sought, and when actions are taken with the right intention to achieve legitimate military objectives and to reduce destruction and collateral death.

Justice (international). One of many essentially contested terms. However, according to a common understanding, just(ice) refers to fair or equitable treatment of individuals, states or regions. An international order might be just or not; the distribution of power or wealth might be considered just or unjust.

Levels of analysis. An analytical means to organize thinking about and analysis of world politics where individuals, groups, societies and states as well as the overall international system represent separate foci, each illuminating an aspect of international relations; helps scholars to be systematic and focused when analysing international politics or international political economy. The number of levels varies yet is often between three and five.

Meta-theory. Theoretical reflections on theory, meaning (**second-order**) theory about(**first-order**) theory.

Methodology. Refers to operational procedures in an academic study of a given topic; modes of analysis and research, e.g. the use of historical or comparative case studies, statistics in causal modelling, interpretive strategies in discourse analysis, procedures for framing an argument within international political theory or formal hypothesis testing.

Multilateralism. Refers to three or more states cooperating on international issues or functional aspects of international relations (security, trade or environmental management) instead of either unilateral efforts by a single state or bilateralism; a way to achieve shared gains by developing mutually acceptable institutions and norms.

Multipolarity. Relates to the distribution of power among three or more of the great powers (or poles) in the international system/society; a systemic, structural state of affairs.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Transnational organizations characterized by an autonomous standing vis-a-vis governments and a diversified membership; work in favour of specific and often narrowly conceived political, economic or social objectives that may have a positive or negative impact on different segments of society. NGOs can include, among others, multinational corporations, labour unions, media companies, churches and religious organizations.

Norms. An often used, yet essentially vague, term in perpetual need of specification; comprises legal, moral and sociological norms. Legal norms emerge when states decide to codify or formalize moral or sociological norms, a process that might be triggered or promoted by norm-entrepreneurs. Sociological norms are associated with custom or habit and therefore not the direct outcome of intended action. If norms are not socially reproduced, they might well erode.

Offensive realists. Oppose the view of **defensive realists** claiming that states only seek an 'appropriate' amount of power, sufficient for balance of power purposes. Advocates of offensive realism argue that since states face an uncertain international environment, security requires the acquisition of as much power as possible.

Ontology. A branch of philosophy dealing with issues related to the existence of things and thereby to one's world view, meaning the essence of things as well as the properties of existence in the world; frequently theorists make a distinction between material and social ontology. See also **epistemology**.

Order. Sustained pattern of social arrangements, comprising both a structural and functional dimension; the former referring to how things are arranged and to the nature of relationship between the constituent parts; the latter relating to the purpose of the arrangement. Examples include the social order (of societies) and the international order (of states).

Peace. Various definitions exist ranging from simply absence of war, a situation of security, stability and order, to harmonious relations between states or other actors.

Pluralism. Concept of international society where sovereign states are the basic units cultivating their own values and interests; states coexist and interact on a basis of selfinterest, expediency, out of mutual recognition and regard for common norms and practices as well as political and commercial reciprocity; a current of thought within the English School. See also **solidarism**.

Positivism. A philosophy of science; within the social sciences a specific methodology concerned with knowledge building based on four assumptions:

- (i) unity of sciences,
- (ii) distinction between facts and values, where facts are neutral among theories,
- (iii) the social world displays regularities that can be discovered by theorists in the same way scientists discover regularities in nature, and (iv) the way to determine the truth of statements is by appeal to neutral facts, meaning the employment of empiricist epistemologies.

Post-positivism. Theoretical tradition rejecting positivism as an appropriate philosophy of science, epistemology and methodology for the study of international relations. Post-positivist currents of thought include, among others, poststructuralism, social constructivism and critical theory.

Process variables. Analysts making use of process variables argue that not all important explanatory factors are either unit or system factors. Examples of process variables include Glenn Snyder's extension of neorealism (relationships, interactions and structural modifiers) and John Ruggie's notion of dynamic density.

Rationalism. In International Relations theory, rationalism refers to two fundamentally different things: for theorists within the international society tradition, rationalism is simply a synonym for their tradition, situated as it is 'middle-of-the-road'-like between *realism* and *revolutionism* (i.e. *liberalism*). These theorists recognize anarchy as the defining characteristic of the international system yet, significantly, add that an international society has developed through centuries and is characterized by common rules and institutions. Second, rationalism refers to rational-choice-like approaches and perspectives, usually imported from economics.

Reason. Analysts make an important distinction between causes of action (as in causal analysis) and reasons for action. The latter refers to justifications for a given action, usually provided to make the action legitimate; reason also refers to the rational thinking of human beings. Not least, liberal theorists make strong assumptions about human reason.

Reflectivism. Sometimes used as a synonym for constructivism. Opposed to purely rationalist and objectivist stances, reflectivists take into consideration the role of social ontologies and social institutions.

Regionalism. Refers to state-led regional cooperative frameworks; institution-building among groups of countries at a regional level; some regard so-called 'new regionalism' a political-institutional response to uneven processes of economic globalization.

Republican states. In contrast to dictatorships or old-time kingdoms, republican states are characterized by constitutions that make citizens' consent matter for decisions on war. As citizens tend to be more sceptical as regards the benefits of war, rulers are somewhat reluctant to wage war; hence, republican states are more inclined to peace than nonrepublican states. This reasoning can be traced back to philosopher Immanuel Kant's reflections on conditions for a perpetual peace. See also **democratic peace theory**.

Responsibility. Refers to a kind of future *duty*, i.e. credited prospectively in a forward-looking sense, to a person or state who is obligated/socially entrusted either on customary, legal or moral grounds with a specific type of action. Responsibility might exist with reference to international law or be self-inflicted due to, for instance, identity or an ethical stance.

Rights. Entitlements to perform or not to perform certain actions, or to live or not to live in given states.

Sanctions. Punitive measures used as an instrument of power; can be imposed on and by any actor in world politics, such as states, governments and governing elites as well as intergovernmental organizations or ordinary groups of consumers; includes any measure that interrupts normal intercourse in global politics, e.g. economic sanctions, boycotts or embargoes.

Second image. Within a three levels of analysis perspective, 'second image' refers to the state level, for instance when explaining the causes of war or the conditions of peace. In second-image perspectives the causes of war are explained by means of characteristics of states, including their domestic institutions and policy-making processes. See also **second image reversed**.

Second image reversed. The opposite analytical perspective to **second-image** theories. Analysts employing a second-image-reversed approach focus on how factors external to a state might constitute the state, including influencing the state's basic institutions and policy-making processes.

Second-order theory. Theoretical reflection that is independent of substantive international relations issues. Examples include the **agent–structure problem** and the distinction between objectivist and subjectivist perspectives. See also **meta-theory**.

Society. Analytical definitions vary significantly due to different emphases on different key features such as autonomy, degree of organization, and changing boundaries of state and society. See also **civil society and international society**.

Solidarism. Concept of international society in which sovereign states jointly pursue common purposes which serve as their ultimate *raison d'être*; in world politics a collective process of cooperative and coordinated activities which leads to joint destinations. See also **pluralism**.

Sovereignty. Claim to political authority based on autonomy and territory that is historically associated with the modern state. Internally, it refers to the right claimed by states to exercise exclusive political authority over a defined territory, including also the claim to a right to autonomy. Externally, it relates to relations with other states. Some make a distinction between formal (legal) sovereignty and the actual capacity to make a state sustainable (in contrast to failed states).

State. A legal-political entity consisting of a territory with defined boundaries, a relatively fixed population (with or without a common identity), a sovereign government or administration exercising supreme authority, and of recognition as a sovereign state by other sovereign states.

State-centric. A perspective that gives primacy to (nation-)states and their national governments as the major or only players in world politics. Most statistics are fairly state-centric.

Structuration theory. Theory proposed as a solution to the agent–structure problem; emphasizes the mutual constitution of agents and structures: in terms of operational analytical procedure, a strategy of bracketing is often suggested, i.e. first agents > structures, then structures > agents (or vice versa).

System. A set of interrelated parts or an arrangement of units connected in such a way as to form a unity; systems can be used as abstract concepts, taxonomies or frameworks by theorists to organize research and analysis. Use of the term varies, for instance international systems being composed of states vis-a-vis world capitalism as an economic and political system constituted by classes with conflicting interests.

Third image. In the three levels of analysis framework, the third image refers to the systemic level; systemic properties, for instance the structure of the international system, the global capitalist system or the global cultural environment, have significant impact on the identity or behaviour of states.

Transnationalism. Transnationalism refers to interactions and coalitions across state boundaries which involve various non-governmental actors, such as multinational corporations or organized criminals. Sometimes transnationalism comprises nongovernmental as well as transgovernmental links. The term *transnational* can be

used to label an actor, e.g. a *transnational* actor, or to describe a pattern of behaviour, for instance an international organization operating across state boundaries and thus acting *transnationally*.

Treaty. An explicit and formal agreement or contract between two or more states specifying norms, rules and principles, e.g. trade arrangements, the pursuit of collective security, arms control, health standards and environmental protection. Treaties in international law are considered binding despite the non-existence of an international enforcing authority per se.

Unilateralism. Denotes a specific foreign policy strategy; decisions are taken by a given state without consulting bilateral or multilateral partners; also called a going-it-alone strategy. See also **multilateralism and bilateralism**.

Unipolarity. Refers to an international distribution of power where there is clearly only one dominant power or 'pole', a world that is subject to the influence of only one great power is *unipolar*; essentially balance of power dynamics is absent.

Universal. Associated with terms such as general, global, common, complete, worldwide, collective, entire, etc.

Values. Political values include preferences with regard to security, equality, freedom, liberty, peace, stability and order.

War. The engagement in military conflicts, usually for some political purpose. Whereas armed conflict between states is *interstate* war, armed conflict within a given state is *civil* war; war involving irregular and usually non-uniformed fighters is *guerrilla* war. Realist and liberal scholars are primarily concerned with the causes of war. Within the international society tradition (the English School) war is considered a fundamental institution of international society.

Westphalian order. Refers to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the first explicit expression of a European society of states with its own diplomatic practices and an emerging body of formal international law; served as a prototype for subsequent developments of international society; the Westphalian international society is based on three principles:

- (i) kings and emperors are sovereign within their own realm;
- (ii) those who rule determine the religion of their realm; and
- (iii) a balance of power system preventing in principle any hegemonic power from emerging.

The (European) international society was subsequently gradually extended and eventually globalized.

World politics. Those stressing the importance of politics beyond state-centric international politics tend to employ the term, or, alternatively, global politics. In this context 'beyond' means including states but also international (or transnational) governmental or non-governmental organizations, other groupings and intellectual leaders. 'Beyond' also means including more issue areas than classic war- and peace-related issues, for instance values, human rights, demographic or environmental issues.

World society. Refers to a society of individuals, not states. Notably, sociologist Niklas Luhmann's conception of world society is influenced by his general systems theory.

World system. A term primarily related to the work of Immanuel Wallerstein. He focuses on capitalism as a world economic system; his theory is influenced by Marxist understandings of capitalism as a global system.