

To what extent does security play a role in governing the relations between states?

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The concept of security, and its implications for the nature of relations between states, is widely debated within the discipline of international relations (IR). Should the study of security mainly concern the national, international, global, or individual? And do the characteristics of the international system condition states to prioritize the security of the state above all else, or are states capable of considering security in a broader, more international, and cooperative sense? The possible answers to these questions vary according to different theoretical approaches within IR. *This assignment will argue that security plays an essential role in governing the relations between states as states seek to maximize their security relative to other states in the anarchical international system.* This assignment thus emphasizes the concept of state security in the context of anarchy. First, an outline of neorealism, the theory that constitutes this assignment's theoretical framework, is presented. Secondly, the assignment offers seven points supporting that the anarchical nature of the international system prompts states to maximize security relative to other states. Lastly, four opposing perspectives regarding the establishment of security through cooperation, the regulation of anarchy, the social construction of anarchy, and the implications of anarchy are presented and refuted.

This assignment is informed by defensive neorealism, which was established by Kenneth Waltz in 1979 (Waltz, 1979). Defensive neorealism has its point of departure in realism, an IR theory that emphasizes rational states as the main actors in an anarchical international system. Defensive neorealism contends that the structure of the international system is characterized by anarchy due to the lack of an overarching authority. This structure makes survival the primary concern of states. Survival is achieved through self-help as states can never be certain of other states' intentions. Furthermore, the structure/polarity of the international system is determined by the relative distribution of capabilities across states (Baylis et al., 2020), where states with relatively more capabilities are more powerful. Following this logic, if State A increases its security, it results in a relative decrease of State B's security, prompting State B to balance against State A by increasing its own security. This is called the security dilemma (Baylis et al., 2020). This anarchical structure characterized by self-help and states' constant concern for survival and the relative distribution of capabilities ultimately causes states to maximize their security relative to other states. States

maximize relative security by seeking to maintain the existing balance of power and by balancing against states that challenge the status quo (Waltz, 1979).

States attempt to maximize their relative security by balancing against military capabilities of other states. Due to the need for self-help in the anarchical international system, states rely on arming and mirroring successful military strategies of surrounding states, thus creating a balance of military power to ensure security and survival. States observe the military capabilities of their peers, and due to the uncertainty about other states' intentions, the arming of one state – even if the arming state itself considers it defensive – will necessarily be considered offensive by other states who are compelled to arm as well (Parent & Rosato, 2015). The 2011 earthquake in Japan can exemplify this. Firstly, the earthquake recovery operation led by Japanese self-defense forces gave states like China a rare insight into Japan's military capabilities (Fujioka, 2011). It was reported that a Chinese patrol helicopter flew close to Japanese sea defenses shortly after the earthquake allowing China to collect information about Japanese military capabilities. Secondly, shortcomings during the self-defense operation urged the Japanese government to acquire RQ-4 reconnaissance aircrafts and amphibious ships. Later, China modernized its own military in these areas claiming to balance against the Japanese military expansion (Lin-Greenberg, 2018). Thus, China enacted in conjunction with defensive neorealism to maximize security relative to Japan, as they sought to mirror Japanese capabilities and arm themselves accordingly.

States' possession of nuclear weapons can provide a strong deterrent against escalating war with/between these states, which contributes to maximizing security in the anarchical system. Waltz argued that states who have nuclear weapons with second-strike capabilities experience a significantly smaller chance of other states engaging in major war with this state, thus making the state relatively more secure (Krieger & Roth, 2007). The concept of nuclear deterrence assumes that the decision to go to war is rational and that a cost-benefit analysis will be carried out beforehand. The security costs – mutually assured destruction – following a nuclear attack greatly outweigh the possible security benefits, thus deterring states from attacking (Krieger & Roth, 2007). However, it

is important to mention that even though states with nuclear weapons are less likely to escalate large-scale conflicts with each other, smaller-scale conflicts cannot be prevented (Rauchhaus, 2009). The India-Pakistan conflict in the Kashmir region provides an example of the above. India and Pakistan both possess nuclear weapons and have had a territorial dispute over the Kashmir region since 1947 (Harshe, 2005). Though the conflict continues to render itself visible – most recently in the 2020-21 clashes on the border – it can be argued that both states' possession of nuclear weapons discourages the states from escalating the conflict.

States form military alliances to balance against powerful and threatening states in order to maximize security. Uncertainty of other states' intentions makes states prefer internal balancing (e.g., improving one's military capabilities) to external balancing (forming alliances). Nonetheless, military alliances allow states – especially smaller ones – to collectively balance against a threatening state or coalition and prevent its domination (Parent & Rosato, 2015). At the beginning of the Cold War, European states were considerably more threatened by the Soviet Union than the United States. To balance against the Soviet Union, these states allied with the powerful United States and created NATO (Walt, 2013). In turn, the Warsaw Pact was formed on the Soviet-side (Baylis et al., 2020). Despite the constant lack of trust between states, these alliances were stable because they were alliances among unequal states – smaller states and a great power. As the smaller states have little choice but to balance collectively against the rival, the alliance leader can be reassured that the allies will not deviate from their support (Waltz, 1988). Thus, military alliances are formed as a matter of convenience, and they enable states to maximize their security relative to a rival's security.

States seek to maintain geopolitical advantages and balance against the geopolitical advantages of others to maximize their relative security. Geopolitical factors such as controlling and gaining access to strategic geographical territory and raw materials can affect the severity of the security dilemma (Taliaferro, 2000). Control over a particular geographical territory can enhance a state's military security if the territory provides a natural buffer that can impede military intervention of other states. Buffers can be difficult terrain, oceans, mountains, or pieces of land (Lobell, 2017). For example, the

1400 miles of shared border between Russia and Ukraine gives Russia a strong interest in keeping Ukraine from entering the NATO alliance, thus permitting a buffer zone between Russia and NATO-countries. Having NATO in Russia's backyard would constitute a security threat to Russia, and the trend of other Eastern European states joining NATO in later years renders this security threat a possibility. Seen in this light, Russia's annexation of Crimea sent a threatening message to Ukraine urging them to comply with Russian strategic interests (Götz, 2015). Additionally, states compete for access to scarce and security-providing resources such as oil, gas, water, energy, and minerals. For example, a trigger of the Arab Israeli Six-Day War in 1967 was the conflict over water from the Jordan River (Cooley, 1984). Conclusively, states attempt to maintain and secure geopolitical advantages to maximize their security relative to others.

States can seek to maximize economic security by balancing against and competing with emerging economic powers. Economic power is closely related to a state's potential for accumulating military capabilities and new technologies. Therefore, economic power is closely related to state security (Waltz, 1993). This gives states an incentive to compete economically as well as in a military manner. The constant concern with relative gains urges states to hinder other states from gaining economic growth at their expense. Therefore, states will either mimic emerging economic powers or try to counter-balance their prosperity (Waltz, 1993). For example, the Chinese economy has experienced massive growth the past decades, establishing China as a great economic power. This success can, in part, be attributed to the large number of foreign investments from international companies choosing to produce in China (Zhang, 2001). In recent years, Vietnam has attempted to mimic this strategy of attracting foreign investments, for instance, by expressing will to treat foreign companies well, thus engaging in competition for investments (Confederation of Danish Industry, 2018). Additionally, the relative increase of Chinese economic power has resulted in a relative decrease of the United States' economic power. In this context, the US-China trade war initiated by the United States in 2018 can be seen as an attempt to balance against China's increasing economic power (Yu, 2020). However, it is debatable whether this particular policy had the intended effects.

States engage in economic cooperation only if they can obtain a relative economic gain and thereby maximize their relative security. Following the reasoning of the previous paragraph, states have a security maximizing incentive to maintain and further their economic power. In some cases, engaging in bilateral or multilateral trade agreements can help facilitate economic prosperity (Waltz, 1993). However, it is important to mention that cooperation is hard to sustain in the self-help system due to states' concern with relative gains (Baylis et al., 2020). According to neorealist Joseph Grieco, a state's utility from cooperating is a function of its own gain compared to the gains of its partners. Therefore, a state will only agree to cooperate if it estimates that it will gain relatively more or at least an equal amount compared to others (Grieco, 1988). In his detailed case study of the negotiations over non-tariff barriers at the Tokyo Round in the GATT, Grieco concludes that the European Community (CE) opposed agreements that generated relatively more benefits to the United States. At the same time, the CE supported agreements that would result in relative gains for the CE or equal distributions of the benefits (Grieco, 1990; Lake, 1991). Thus, engaging in economic cooperation to improve economic prosperity, and thus security, is a possibility. However, cooperation is limited by states' concern with relative gains.

Finally, states attempt to collect information about the capabilities and strategic intentions of other states to maximize security. In the anarchical international system, states act under the condition of incomplete information and uncertainty of others' intentions. Simultaneously, states are rational actors who seek to make decisions based on all information available (Krieger & Roth, 2007; Parent & Rosato, 2015). Collecting information about the military capabilities of their peers can help states determine other states' tactical intentions – i.e., where, when, and how to attack (Bitton, 2014). States use drones and reconnaissance aircrafts equipped with surveillance technology to gather information about the rival's military capabilities and location. An example of this is the Israeli use of drones in the Second Lebanon War to provide real-time information about the location of Hezbollah forces and to search for rocket launching sites in Lebanon (Borg, 2021). Furthermore, states can try to collect information about other states' strategic intentions – i.e., whether a state intends to attack. For example, cyber espionage was carried out by the hacker group APT28 on the Norwegian parliament

(2020) and the Democratic National Committee (2016), where digital information was stolen. According to US authorities, the hacker group has close affiliations with the Russian military intelligence agency (Center of Cyber Security, 2021). Though uncertainty in the international system is a constant factor, states evidently attempt to collect as much information about other states as possible to maximize their relative security.

So far, this assignment has argued that security plays an essential role in governing the relations between states as states seek to maximize their security relative to other states in the anarchical international system. An opposing point to this line of argument is found in the IR theory neoliberalism. Neoliberals such as Keohane would argue that security plays a role in governing the relations between states insofar as states establish security through cooperation in international institutions (Baylis et al., 2020). Neoliberals argue that growing economic interdependence between states and the idea that states care more about absolute gains make cooperation through international institutions possible and mutually beneficial (Keohane & Nye, 1987). Firstly, this view is lacking as states have little incentive to cooperate in a self-help system with distrust. The game theoretic Prisoner's Dilemma can explain this. Even though cooperation might give the highest joint pay-off, the individual state has an incentive to deviate from cooperation because of uncertainty about the other state's intentions and the fact that the individual state can secure a higher pay-off by deviating (Grieco, 1988). Secondly, if cooperation is facilitated, states will continue to act out of self-interest with concern for relative gains. The COP26 climate negotiations provide an example of international cooperation that could result in large absolute benefits but is characterized by gridlock tendencies due to the prospect of uneven relative gains among states.

Another opposing view to this assignment's line of argument suggests that the establishment of international organizations and enforcement of international law can regulate anarchy and thus provide security (Baylis et al., 2020). This view thereby rejects the neorealist idea that maximizing relative security through self-help is the only option for states to obtain security. Liberal idealists such as Woodrow Wilson argued that peace and international order can be constructed through

international organizations and international law. For instance, international courts and the supranational organization, United Nations, enforce laws and regulations regarding conflict and the use of force to promote security and peace between sovereign states in the international society (Baylis et al., 2020). Waltz, however, emphasized that the capacity of international law to constrain the behavior of states is limited at most. States are inclined to disregard international law due to the relatively weak sanctions that violations might entail (Waltz, 2000). The Russian annexation of Crimea and the US intervention in Iraq without the approval of the UN Security Council are just a few examples of states disregarding international law and thereby acting according to anarchy. Furthermore, neorealists point that international organizations merely reflect powerful states' interests and competition for influence (Scweller & Preiss, 1997). Thus, international organizations constitute yet another arena for self-help where states maximize their relative gains and security.

Thirdly, social constructivist Alexander Wendt argues that anarchy in the international system does not necessarily condition states to pursue relative security maximization as "anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt, 1992). Wendt presents anarchy as a social construction. He points that the neorealist meaning of anarchy with the prevalence of self-help only has this meaning due to "...collective insecurity-producing practices." (Wendt, 1992). Furthermore, this argument entails the possibility of transforming the inter-subjective understandings that are imposed on anarchy. Under certain conditions states can initiate self-conscious actions to transform its identity and interests as part of an effort to change the understanding of anarchy among states. Wendt exemplifies this with Gorbachev's introduction of the policy "New Thinking" and practices that signaled trust to the United States, which led to the shared knowledge of the end of the Cold War (Baylis et al., 2020). However, Wendt's argument is lacking as the fact that the anarchical structure is socially constructed does not necessarily make it changeable (Baylis et al., 2020). Even if one state shows signs of changing behavior, the opposing state can never be certain that its actual intentions are benign. Therefore, the everlasting need for security force states to assume the worst of their opponents' intentions and act thereafter. Thus, the anarchical "construction" of the international system remains a constant that forces states to maximize their security relative to other states.

Finally, offensive neorealists such as John Mearsheimer would argue that the international anarchical structure encourages states to maximize their relative power and thereby obtain security. Mearsheimer holds that the best way for a state to ensure its survival is to be as powerful as possible relative to other states. The reasoning behind this is that the likelihood of attacks from other states decreases when a state increases its share of world power (Mearsheimer, 2006). Waltz, however, opposes this point as he finds that power maximizing behavior does not always result in the maximization of security. Waltz recognizes power as a means to an end, where that end is security, but he maintains that “the first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system” (Waltz, 1979). Purely power maximizing behavior can ultimately prove to be counterproductive as it provokes counter-balancing from other states and thereby creates more threats to state security (Baylis et al., 2020; Waltz, 1979). For example, Japan’s aggressive expansion in East Asia during the Second World War and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor resulted in the United States joining the Allies to balance against the Axis powers and defeated the Japanese empire (Samuels, 2006). Thus, states are better off maximizing their relative security by seeking to maintain the current balance of power and balance against states that challenge this.

In conclusion, this assignment has argued that security plays an essential role in governing the relations between states as states seek to maximize their security relative to other states in the anarchical international system. Neorealism has provided a framework for supporting this line of argument. The anarchical system characterized by self-help and uncertainty of the intentions of others force states to maximize their relative security in a variety of ways: (1) balancing against military capabilities of other states, (2) relying on nuclear deterrence, (3) forming military alliances, (4) maintaining geopolitical advantages and balancing against those of others, (5) balancing against and competing with emerging economic powers, (6) obtaining relative economic gains in economic cooperation and (7) attempting to collect information about capabilities and strategic intentions of other states. Furthermore, this assignment has fended off four opposing views from: neoliberalism, liberal idealism, social constructivism, and offensive neorealism, with regards to: the establishment

of security through cooperation, the regulation of anarchy, anarchy as a social construction, and anarchy's implications on state behavior. Thus, this assignment concludes that security is an essential driver of the international relations between states, as states are conditioned to maximize their security relative to other states in the anarchical international system.

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