



## Realism is not enough (or how James Bond became an expert in negotiation and coalition building skills in the post-Cold War era)

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*“(Liberal theory) should not be seen as an antithesis to Realist analysis  
but as a supplement to it.*

*International relations theory is unnecessarily impoverished by exclusivist claims  
and by forgetting its history.*

*Both Liberal and Realist theories have something to offer.*

*Our current predicament is too serious to ignore either”.*

*Joseph Nye (1987)*

### **I. Choosing the right question to reach the right answer: Accepting K.Waltz’s challenge.**

In *Structural Realism after the Cold War*, K.Waltz responds to the critics of realism by posing a challenge: “What changes, one may wonder, would turn international politics into something distinctly different?” Or, even more precisely: “What sort of changes would alter the international political system so profoundly that old ways of thinking would not longer be relevant?”

This paper accepts K.Waltz’s intellectual challenge and analyzes the elements that have changed the world in a way such as not to make old ways of thinking completely *irrelevant* but, at least, clearly *insufficient*. Indeed, in order to help his defense of realism K.Waltz asks the wrong question. Be it in a voluntary or involuntary way, the truth is that the father of structural realism somehow misinterprets the nature and extent of criticisms to realist theory: most critics do not argue that realism is not relevant, what they mainly claim is that realism is not longer sufficient. The question realists should therefore ask is rather: “What sort of changes would alter the international political system so profoundly that old ways of thinking would not longer be *sufficient*?” Only such a question will allow the emergence of a fruitful debate and, most importantly, will be able to trigger the kind of synergy that Nye suggests in the quote opening this paper.

It goes without saying that the thesis of this paper is that Realism is not enough. Departing from K.Waltz’s reformulated question, this essay argues that the post-cold war world cannot be successfully explained from the traditional realist approach. In order to fully understand the rationale and ultimate nature of the current world it is necessary to compound realist thinking with liberal and constructivist insights. New times call for new thinking.

In the second part, this paper provides an analysis of American Foreign Policy after the terrorist attacks of the 11<sup>th</sup> September in the light of the theoretical conclusions reached in section II. What has been widely described as the worst crisis/conflict after the II World War looks like the best case study to examine how “healthy” realist foreign policy is. Specially, if one considers that Bush administration departed as one of the most intellectually realist administrations ever.

## **II. Facing K.Waltz's Challenge: Dealing with how the international political system changed so profoundly that old ways of thinking are not longer sufficient.**

### ***Realism without war? A Pluralistic Interdependent Security Community***

Robert Jervis would reply to K.Waltz's question ("What sort of changes would alter the international political system so profoundly that old ways of thinking would not longer be *sufficient*?") in a very straightforward way: "The absence of war among the leading powers would itself be a change of major proportions, but the change goes even further because war is not even contemplated (...).Or even more compellingly: "Given the scale and frequency of war among the great powers in the preceding millennia this (the absence of war) is a change of spectacular proportions, perhaps the single most striking discontinuity that the theory of international politics has anywhere provided." (Jervis, 2002) The striking absence of wars leads Jervis to resort to Deutsch's concept of Security Community in order to describe the new nature of the international system. Such a concept is useful because it does not only stress the fact that war is unthinkable but also the fact that the international anarchy has been somehow replaced by the existence of a qualitatively different *community*!! Beyond the absence of war and the existence of a Security Community, there are other factors that are contributing to change the world that leads K.Waltz to present realism as the only valid theory. Most of them are liberal insights (democracy efficacy argument, institutions matter, economic inter-dependence, soft power) but there is also an important and complementary constructivist input: common identities<sup>1</sup>.

### ***The Democracy Efficacy argument: The political nature of states matters...***

The democracy efficacy argument, defended by most liberal theorists, challenges realist assumptions in a straight way: democracies don't fight each other. It is however true, as realists claim, that the time scope on which such argumentation is based is probably not long enough to reach definitive cause-effect conclusions. Yet, evidence allows to already conclude that (at the very least) democracies fight each other much less than other political regimes. There are three main reasons for democracies not to follow the classic realist paradigm of war and conflict (Jervis, 2002): a) the very norms of democracy (compromise, non violence, respect of law) are conducive to peace; b) democratic transparency and free flow of information prevents or mitigates the emergence of dangerous misperceptions that could lead to war and conflict; c) democracies tend to be more open and economically interdependent among each other, thus contributing to the creation of a web of common interests. In short: the unprecedented extension of democratic regimes does alter the international order in a relevant way.

### ***Economic Interdependence: Globalization matters***

An ever increasing economic interdependence (both a cause and a consequence of peace) is another distinct feature of the post-Second World War period. Fueled by globalization and the international institutions created in the aftermath of the II World War (Breton Woods setup) the world has witnessed (and is still witnessing) a process of growing interdependence among states. But the key question is: how does interdependence change the world on which realists base their assumptions? Well, interdependence matters because it reduces the likelihood of conflict and war and, most importantly, because it turns peace to become an end in itself. In other words,

economic relations (trade and investment) bring about gains that would otherwise be sought through war and conflict. Once the gains are there, the maintenance of peace and stable relations becomes a major concern for both the main economic operators and the "consumerist" people as a whole and, subsequently, to the governments that wish to be reelected. There is a further argument that makes interdependence very relevant and reinforces the new character of state behavior: honor and glory have been supplanted by the material gain as the major national and individual interest.

### ***Institutions matter...***

The international political system has never witnessed such an institutionalized world as the one we confront today. Institutions are a very distinct feature of the post-second World War period. But, again, why should institutions be perceived as another factor that helps to mitigate the constraints of the so-called international anarchy? First, as Keohane has brilliantly argued, institutions are important because they reduce the transaction costs (mainly informational) of action. Besides facilitating cooperative behavior, the current complex setup of institutions also reduces the scope of relative gains (one of the realist "favorites") by: a) expanding the fields in which a loss can be compensated by a gain (issue linkage); b) conversely, expanding the range and degree of possibilities to punish an outsider, unilateral or free-riding behavior. Keeping it short and simple: a dense network of institutions provides the community with new means to both prevent and resolve conflicts that otherwise would not be prevented or easily resolved. K.Waltz has argued that, no matter how developed institutions become, the fact is that international institutions serve primarily national rather than international interest. However, that is not, as he presumes, a realist revelation. It is just common sense. There is an extended (and unfair) misconception according to which self-interest and national interest are exclusive realist arguments. Such a misguided assumption implies that other theories, notably liberalism, are stupid or naïve enough not to be based on one's own interest but rather on some other's interest. And that assumption is wrong: indeed, liberal theorists also believe in self-interest and national interest. Their critique to realism and main contribution is precisely that self-interest can be served by institutions and international cooperation in a more effective way than by unilateral and "preservation maximizing" behavior.

### ***Common Identity: the value of a community***

Unlike liberal theorists, whose main arguments have been highlighted in the precedent sections, constructivists stress the role played by norms and common sets of rules in the creation of common identities. According to constructivist theorists, changes in ideas, self-images and images of the others have substantially transformed the nature of the international system. As people and states have become more socialized into a new set of democratic attitudes, rules and values, war has become more difficult and peace more valuable. The three liberal above-mentioned factors (economic interdependence, democracy and institutions) have fueled the emergence and consolidation of common identities. The sense of Community, based upon an increasingly common identity (attachment to non-violence, democracy, material gains over honor) is, definitely, an important added source of order that challenges the anarchic nature of realist world (dis)order.

### **Soft Power**

Intimately related to the previous factors, the emergence of Soft power deserves special attention. Joseph Nye's insightful concept is valuable in this argumentation as it adds another factor that helps to mitigate the anarchical nature of the international system. Soft power underlines the power of a country's cultural and ideological appeal and the ability to get desired outcomes through attraction instead of force. And persuading others to follow you is mainly achievable by convincing other states to agree to norms and institutions that produce your wanted results. As J.Nye himself has pointed out: "If a country can make its position attractive in the eyes of others and strengthen international institutions that encourage others to define their interests in compatible ways, it may not need to spend as many traditional economic or military resources" (Nye: 1999)

### **Of how realism became minimalist in order to survive...**

In *Structural Realism after the Cold War*, K.Waltz nuances the potential challenge posed by the elements highlighted in the precedent sections *when individually considered*. However, the real challenge that K.Waltz does not address is much more powerful: individually, the discussed factors might not be perceived as conclusive challenges or alternatives to structural realism, yet, their combined and mutually reinforcing effect makes them an insurmountable theoretical obstacle for realism. It is hardly refutable that the absence of war, the existence of a Security Community, the centrality of democracy, the increasing interdependence resulting from the globalization process, the consolidation and extension of international institutions, the systemic influence of common values and the emergence of soft power have changed the world in a way such as not to make old ways of thinking completely *irrelevant* but clearly *insufficient*. This major transformation has been attained through a positive autocatalytic process, in which each of the referred individual elements fed each other as mutually reinforcing factors. Jervis (2002:9) has stressed the importance of this combined effect in a revealing way: "The Community may then contain within it the seeds of its own growth through the feedbacks among its elements"<sup>2</sup>.

That being said, one might conclude that the only way for realism to resist the challenge posed by the combined effect of the above-mentioned factors is to become a category broad and loose enough to signify, in Legro and Moravsik (1999) words "little more than a generic commitment to rational state behavior in anarchy". In other words: "minimal realism". As it was stressed in the introduction, K.Waltz's inquiries regrettably preclude any kind of synergy between realism and other approaches. If any, they would probably lead him to label the synergy resulting from liberal and constructivist criticisms as, in Moravsik and Legro's view (1999) "as a progressive confirmation or extension of realist theory rather than the demonstration of its limitations." If not the refutation of the realist theory, realists should at least concede the narrowing of the theoretical domain under which realist causal mechanisms are likely to function. And one may add, as this paper has attempted to demonstrate: anarchy is what states make of it. As the following section will try to illustrate, the nature of anarchy has changed so as to make rational state behavior inclined towards "realistic" (not realist) multilateralism, interdependence, institution development, coalition building...

### **III. The World Order and American Foreign Policy after 11 September 2001: From the World is not Enough.....to Realism is not Enough (or How James Bond became an expert in negotiation and coalition building skills in the post-Cold War era)**

"We are creating a coalition to go after terrorism. We are asking the United Nations and every other organization you can think of—United Nations, NATO, the European Union, the Organization of Islamic Countries, the OAS, everybody—to join us once and for all in a great coalition to conduct a campaign against terrorists who are conducting war against civilized people".

**Colin Powell**, *Newshour with Jim Lehrer*,  
September 13, 2001

"And so we have to attack on all fronts and we have to do it with a broad coalition because this enemy is spread out across the world. And it will take the international community. It will require intelligence actions, legal actions, financial actions, military actions, diplomatic and political actions—all part of a comprehensive campaign not to go after just one person but to go after a network, the al-Qaeda network and to go after other terrorist organizations that are practicing this kind of evil upon the civilized world."

**Colin Powell**, *CBS Face the Nation*,  
September 16, 2001

Sudden, perversely effective and brutally inhuman, the terrorist strikes in New York and Washington seem to have changed the world. It has been argued that the only time that realist tradition receives a wide hearing is when the security of the American nation is in peril. Conversely, when the nation is enjoying peace and prosperity liberalism is bound to be triumphant. The paradox this section puts forward is that even when the American nation is in peril (as it is now), liberal insights are more than necessary to account for both the nature of the world order and the orientation of American foreign policy.

No one foresaw the horrible terrorist attack of the last 11 September, Moravsik and Legro (2001) did however foresee a shift in American foreign policy as they warned last summer "So don't be surprised if the "new realism" starts to look different this autumn". Of course, they did not base their predictions on the outlook of such a terrible future, their point was simply that "if the Bush administration remains attuned to global reality, it is likely to become more pragmatic as well, expanding tactical options beyond unilateral military action" (Moravsik and Largo: 2001). Their prediction has been confirmed: the most "theoretically" realist administration is pursuing "less-than-realist" policies in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. The so-called moderating effect of power and the extreme gravity of the current conflict have constrained G.W Bush's administration so as to shift its policy from a hard core realist stand to a more pragmatic and realistic (paradoxically less realist) foreign policy. Not so surprisingly, the truth is that the classical foreign policy options derived from the realist thinking (containment and balancing of power) seem not to have been pursued in the post-terrorist attack scenario. Realists used to defend themselves against liberal critics (who claimed that containment and balancing of power were irrelevant in the post-cold war period and, most importantly, that states were not being punished by the system for not containing nor balancing) by saying "not today but tomorrow". Well, everyone seems to agree that terrorist attacks have suddenly placed the world in the in the XXI century, in what we all used to call "tomorrow". How then do American foreign policy and the international order look in today's "tomorrow"?

### ***Should the United States go alone or with others? Multilateralism, Democracy and Hegemony***

During the first months in office, Bush's administration (headed by the hard core realists Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld) has struggled to reconcile its intellectual commitment to realist thinking with the "idealist" and multilateral legacy that had characterized Clinton's foreign policy. However, as a consequence of the attacks, Bush's preference for unilateralism<sup>3</sup> seems to have been suddenly replaced by a subtle and more sophisticated understanding of the nature of the international order (in line with the thinking of the less realist of the administration, State Secretary Colin Powell). As the President himself has acknowledged "Just as Pearl Harbor awakened this country from the notion that we could somehow avoid the call to duty and defend freedom in Europe and Asia in World War II, so, too, should this most recent surprise attack erase the concept in some quarters that America can somehow go it alone in the fight against terrorism or in anything else for that matter"<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, the need for allies but also the need for international legitimacy has discarded the "go alone" approach. International legitimacy has become increasingly important for the American "hyperpower" in a more democratic, interdependent and institutionalized world. As a result of the crisis, Bush has had to put a higher premium on international cooperation, thus allowing Colin Powell to lead the building of an international coalition.

Against realist impulses of unilateral and unconstrained independent military action, and following world wide demands, G.W Bush, unlike Clinton, did not immediately respond to the terrorist attacks with a missile attack. Instead the President accepted first European demands to provide hard proof of guilt against Bin Laden and Taliban regime before starting the attack. Then, responding to world wide demands, Bush emphasized that Islamic terrorism is different from Islam. And finally, he got to recognize that this "war" requires coalitions and diplomatic and economic components as well as military ones.

Engagements in international cooperation, the building of a coalition, commitment to alliances reduce national autonomy. The striking point is that the auto-limitation and self-restraint resulting from the new nature (interdependent, democratic, institutionalized..) of the international system are embraced by a hard core realist administration. As Philip Gordon (2001) has stated: "The new premium on Russian cooperation, for example, might make it harder or *more costly* for Washington to proceed with current policy plans to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, enlarge NATO, or press for human rights in Chechnya"<sup>5</sup>. In a similar way, getting Pakistan on the coalition might mean, in turn, lifting economic sanctions, helping with debt relief, and reforming US position on Kashmir. The need for Chinese support will probably make it more costly and difficult to support Taiwan, to proceed with missile defense, or to publicly criticize Beijing's human rights practices. Yet, it is a more even-handed approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to secure the indispensable support of moderate Arab states to the US mission what is likely to become the most sensitive shift in US Foreign Policy. As a matter of fact, Republicans have already alluded to the Palestinian right to their own state for the first time in history.

It is however true that Bush's administration has not gone so far as to, for instance, stop bombing (to prevent a humanitarian crisis) and have Bin Laden tried in a third country as Taliban have suggested. Although they have become more costly, it has not gone so far as to shelve its plans for NATO expansion and a national missile defense. The critical need for Russian, Chinese and European support has nevertheless entailed and is likely to entail "concessions". And why is "going together" better than going alone and not having to making concessions? Most liberal thinkers would advocate for a greater use of institutional frameworks of cooperation and coalitions as the best way to

maximize the stability and well being of the international system, but also a way to spread the burden of global leadership and increase the legitimacy and primacy of both the American hegemon and the international order.

Because an "hegemon" has a far more relevant range of unilateral and bilateral options available to it than any other state, realists wonder why such a powerful country would accept limitations on its autonomy and self-restraint in the use of its capabilities. From a realist perspective, a hegemon will turn to unilateral action in order to exploit its preponderance, protect its sovereignty, maximize its maneuvering room and preserve the maximization of other states' power. American Foreign Policy however seems to have rather adopted a mid-way strategy in which cooperation matters, international institutions matter, dialogue is indispensable and security is not only a military affair any more. The terrorist attacks are in fact a good example of how the nature of threats to global security is evolving. The challenges posed by illicit drugs, terrorism, environmental despoliation, human-rights abuses and weapons proliferation respect no borders and cross many disciplines. They cannot be solved unilaterally. The new world requires, as J.Nye (1999) has argued, "using soft-power concepts creatively, negotiations rather than coercion, powerful ideas rather than powerful weapons, public diplomacy rather than backroom bargaining."

In short, as Ikenberry has argued (2001:22) the character of postwar order has changed as the capacities of states to restrain power and establish commitments has changed. The first part of this paper has analyzed the factors that have transformed the capacities of states to restrain their power and establish commitments. This last section has shown that after the World War the world and the terrorist attacks of the 11 September the world is not shifting towards a traditional balance of power. Cooperation, engagement, compromise, democracy are far more recurrent concepts than containment or balancing of power.

David Von Drehle wrote in the Washington Post on September 12, 2001: "bin Laden is in one sense the sort of menace-without-a-country that figured, cartoonishly, in old James Bond movies". Since no man stood up to the challenge of the Cold War like Her Majesty's secret agent 007, we might feel tempted to resort to his ability to fight against terrorism. That would be a mistake. As this paper has demonstrated, in the post-Cold war reality and, particularly, after 11 september, the old James Bond-Cold War politics are not enough. The international order to which K.Waltz is so attached has changed so as to make old ways of thinking no longer sufficient. It has been reported that James Bond is following a coalition building and international cooperation skills seminar at the United Nations in New York. Condoleeza Rice is one of the participants.

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## Notas al pie

<sup>1</sup> Although the reactions to the terrorist attacks of September 11 are analyzed in the last section of this paper, it is worth to illustrate the "common identity" with the headline of *Le Monde's* first page on September 13: "We are all Americans".

<sup>2</sup> Jervis (2002: 14) has also addressed the issue of an autocatalytic process in a more historical perspective: "The American willingness to engage in extensive cooperation abroad, the European willingness to go far down the road of integration, the Japanese willingness to tie itself closely to the US were improbable without the Cold War. But having been established, these forms of cooperation set off positive feedback and are now self-sustaining".

<sup>3</sup> Bush administration has refused to sign or support a large number of international agreements including, among others: the ABM treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty; the International Criminal Court; the Biological Weapons Protocol verification mechanism; and the Kyoto Protocol.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Both supporters and opponents of ballistic missile defenses claim that the events of Sept. 11 strengthen their case. Proponents claim that the attacks showed that we need to protect ourselves against unexpected but devastating threats, while opponents point out that the terrorists did not need ballistic missiles—merely knives and box cutters—to perpetrate their crimes.