

Transcript: Three Images of Analysis

Perhaps the most influential theorist of International Relations was Kenneth Waltz, who in 1959 wrote a classic book, *Man, the State and War* which provided three levels of analysis, or what he called images, that can be used to explain what motivates state action.

First Image

The first image focuses on human nature, locating the possibilities for peace and war at the level of individual biology and psychology. On this reading, humans are either primed for conflict or cooperation, and the challenge for us as students of cooperation becomes understanding how this shapes behaviour at the international level. So if you want to explain why cooperation failed in 1914 and 1939, but worked in 1962 when the world avoided nuclear war over Cuba, the place to look is who has their hand on the wheel of history. First image accounts therefore often focus on the crucial role played by certain key individuals in shaping the outcomes of decisive historical events.

Second Image

By contrast, the second image explains the rise and fall of cooperation by focusing on the domestic character of states. Whether we cooperate or not depends crucially on the nature of the political systems that we find ourselves living in. So it makes a world of difference whether we are interacting with a state that shares our values or one that opposes them.

The most prominent example of this is democratic peace theory which claims that no two democracies have ever gone to war against each other. This is because... What Jack Levy claims to be as close to an 'iron law' as you can get in international politics asserts the primacy of the second image in motivating state behaviour.

Put simply, a second image account asserts that state behaviour is shaped by the character of its domestic politics; you would therefore expect a democratic state to act in a noticeably different manner than a communist or authoritarian equivalent.

Third Image

Many theorists of International Relations, however, are dissatisfied with explanations that rely only on the first and second images. For these theorists, primacy is given to the third image which focuses on the international system rather than human nature or the domestic character of states.

Many theorists of International Relations describe the international system as being defined by the condition of what they refer to as "international anarchy". By anarchy, they do not necessarily mean that world politics is characterised by chaos, disorder, and unending war as you would perhaps think; rather, the term international anarchy refers in a more formal sense to the absence of a world government. Rather than necessarily implying disorder, the term international anarchy denotes the structure within which international politics operates, specifically, one in which there is no higher authority than the state.

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From Greek city states to the present day, international anarchy is seen to link 26 centuries of human history; third image theorists, however, disagree over what international anarchy means in terms of the possibilities of cooperation. At its simplest, the field of International Relations divides over the question of whether sustained interstate cooperation is possible under the condition of anarchy. By the end of this course, you will be in a much better position to give your own answer to that question.

We will now look at three of the major theoretical approaches to International Relations which tell us very different stories about the possibilities for cooperation under anarchy. A knowledge of these approaches will help you be able to critically engage with the various case study puzzles that you will encounter over the next three weeks.