

SYSTEM LEVEL THEORY # 1

Realism



REALISM

Realism is the oldest theory for understanding and explaining international politics, the roots of this school of thought extending back 2,500 years.



REALISM

The fundamental principles and implications of **realism** can be found in the writings of the ancient Greek historian **Thucydides**...



The **strong** do what they have to do and the **weak** accept what they have to accept.

– *Thucydides*

REALISM

The infographic is divided into two main sections by a large red star. The top left features the US flag and the text 'What is the'. The top right features the Chinese flag. The central title is 'Thucydides Trap?'. The left side, in blue, contains a quote from Thucydides. The right side, in red, contains a quote from Xi Jinping. A small 'B' logo is in the bottom right corner.

What is the

Thucydides Trap?

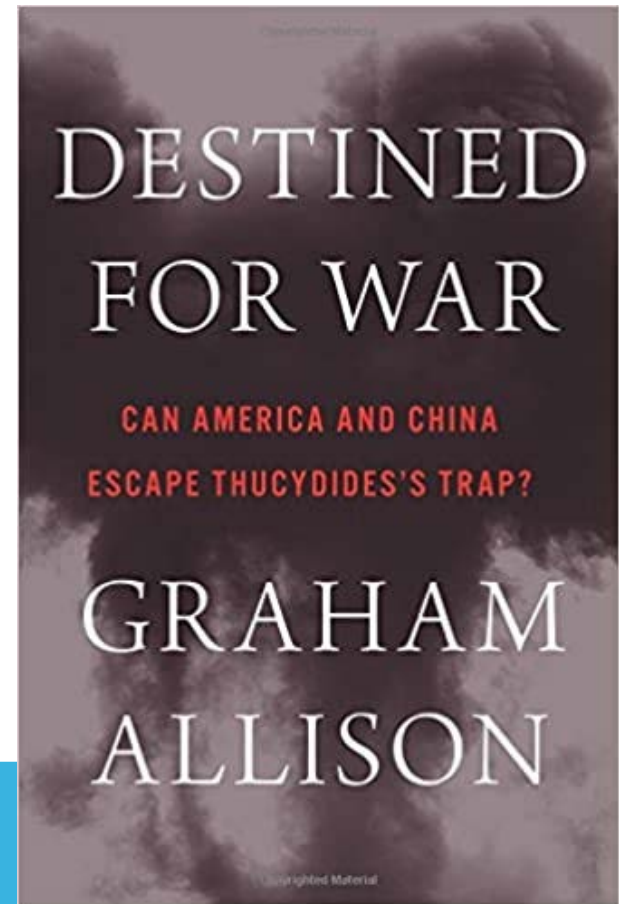
"It was the rise of Athens, and the fear that this inspired in Sparta, that made war inevitable."

-Thucydides

"We all need to work together to avoid the Thucydides trap - destructive tensions between an emerging power and established powers."

-Xi Jinping
President of China

B



REALISM

....and the Italian Renaissance political philosopher **Niccolo Machiavelli**.

WARS

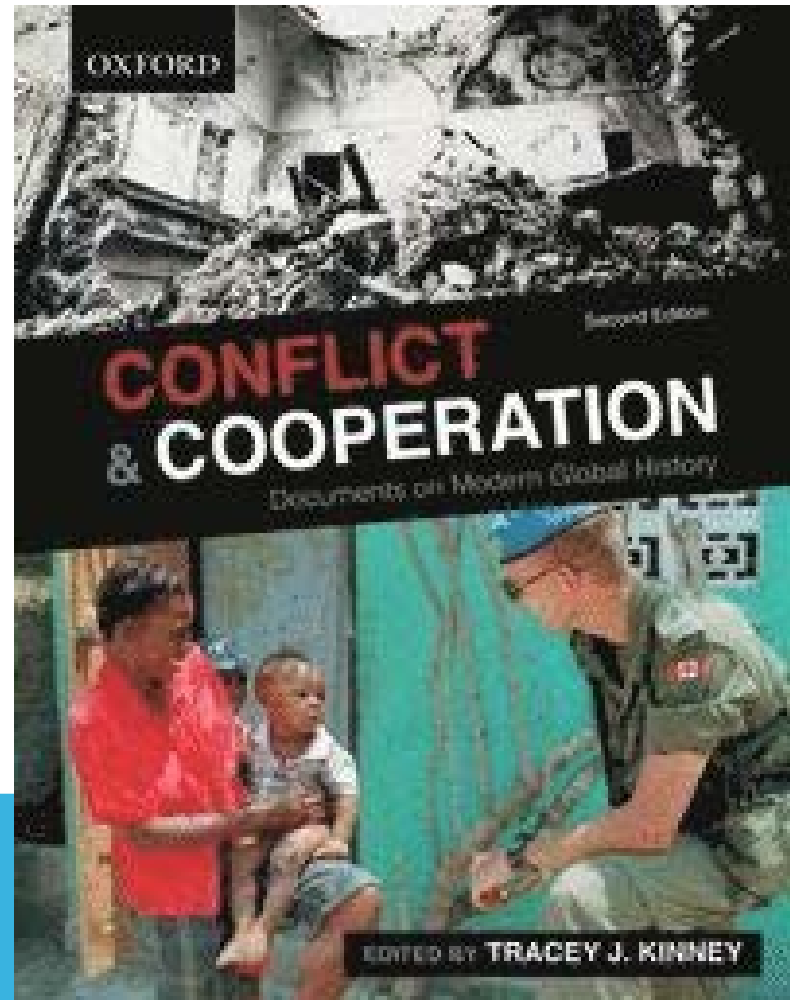
BEGIN WHEN YOU WILL,
BUT THEY DO NOT
END WHEN YOU PLEASE.

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

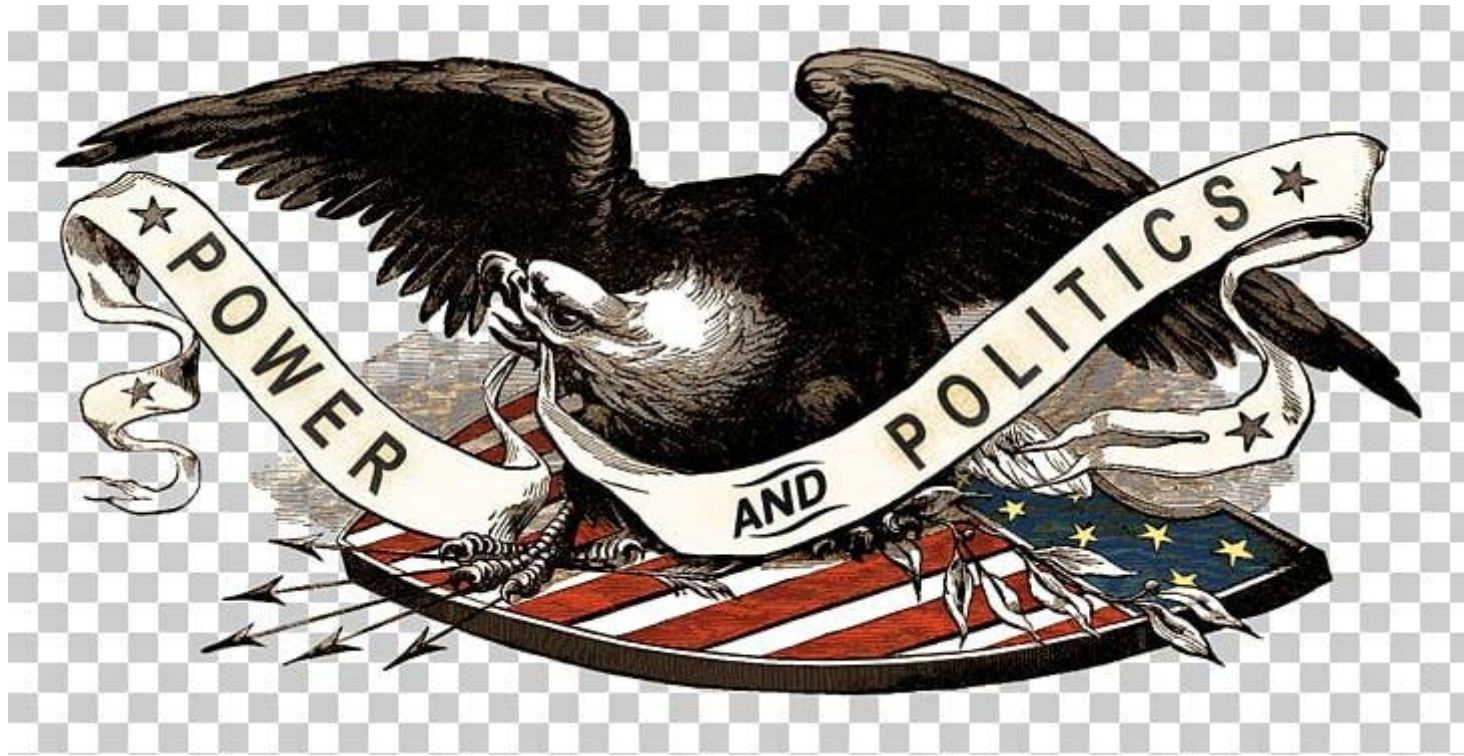
wist.info

REALISM

Scholars argue that leaders rely on **realist theory** because it presents a “realistic” view of international relations and focuses on how the world *is* rather than how it *ought to be*.



REALISM



For **realists**, power is the key factor in understanding international relations.

REALISM

Global politics is considered a contest for power among states.



REALISM

A state's power is measured primarily in terms of its military capabilities.



HOW US AND IRANIAN MILITARY MIGHT COMPARES

USA	VS	IRAN
£547 BILLION	DEFENCE BUDGET	£4.8 BILLION
2,141,900	TROOPS	873,000
13,398	MILITARY AIRCRAFT	509
6,287	TANKS	1,634
39,223	ARMoured VEHICLES	2,345
4,018	NUCLEAR MISSILES	0
24	AIRCRAFT CARRIERS	0
68	SUBMARINES	34

REALISM

The Components of Realism



REALISM

Focus of Analysis

Struggle for power among states in an anarchic international system



REALISM

Major Actors

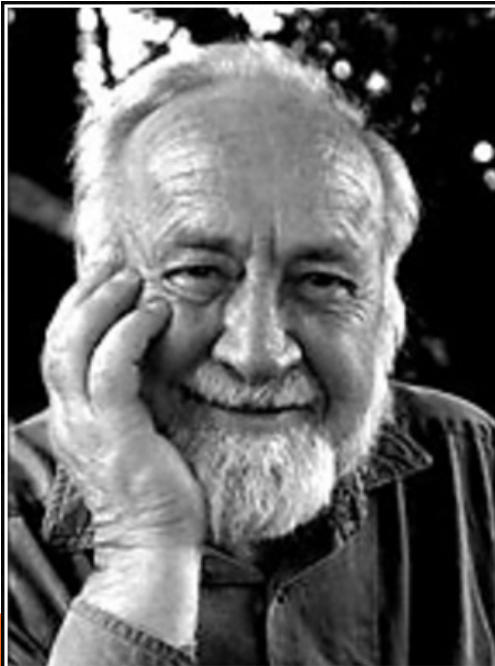
States



REALISM

Behavior of States

Rational, unitary actors



To accumulate wealth, power or land beyond one's needs in a limited world is to be truly immoral, be it as an individual, an institution, or a nation-state.

— *Bill Mollison* —

AZ QUOTES

What would a realist have to say about this quote?

REALISM

Goals of States

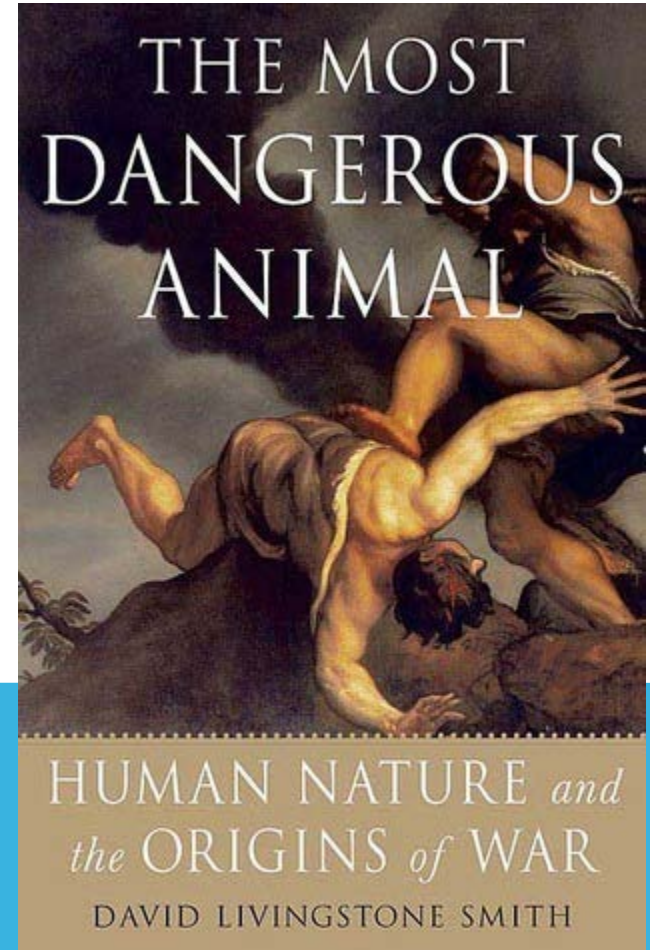
Enhance power and security



REALISM

View of Human Nature

Pessimistic



REALISM

Condition of the International System

Anarchic; Self-help system



This...



Not this...

REALISM

Key Concepts



REALISM

Key Concepts

Security Dilemma

The problem of fear, insecurity, and lack of trust among states living in an anarchic international system. A state builds up arms to protect itself, but that just makes other states fearful, creating an arms race and making the world less secure.



REALISM

Key Concepts

Balance of Power

A policy aimed at maintaining the international status quo. Peace and security are best preserved when power is distributed among five or more states and no single state has a preponderance of power.



REALISM

Key Concepts

Power Politics

Policies in which force, or the threat of force, is the primary method used to further a state's interests. For realists, international relations is a struggle for power and security among competing states.



Power politics is the diplomatic name for the law of the jungle.

— *Ely Culbertson* —

REALISM

Key Concepts

Anarchy

Refers to the lack of a central authority or government to enforce law and order between states throughout the globe.

International System According to Realists

- Anarchic (all Realists agree)
 - No authority above the state; state is sovereign
 - Anarchic structure constrains actions of decision-makers and affects distribution of capabilities among various actors
 - Each state must look out for own interests
- Differ on degree of state autonomy
 - Traditional Realists recognize states act and shape system
 - Neorealists believe states are constrained by structure of international system

REALISM

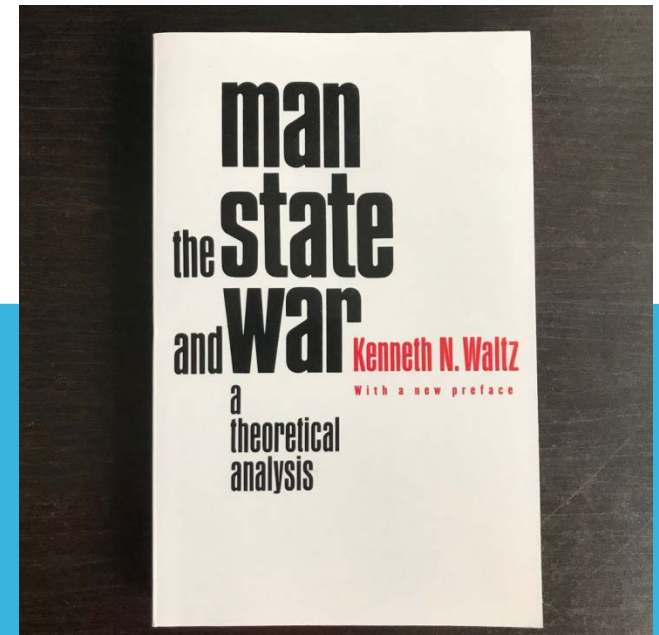
Key Concepts

Self-help System

A neo-realist concept that, in an anarchic international system where there is no overarching global authority (like a world government) to enforce peace and stability, each state is responsible for its survival and cannot rely on other states.

Why do Realists claim that states must pursue power or that morality has no place in world politics?

- The world is anarchic and it is a self-help system. To survive states must pursue power.
- Also, if there is no higher authority, then there is no international law that states must abide by.

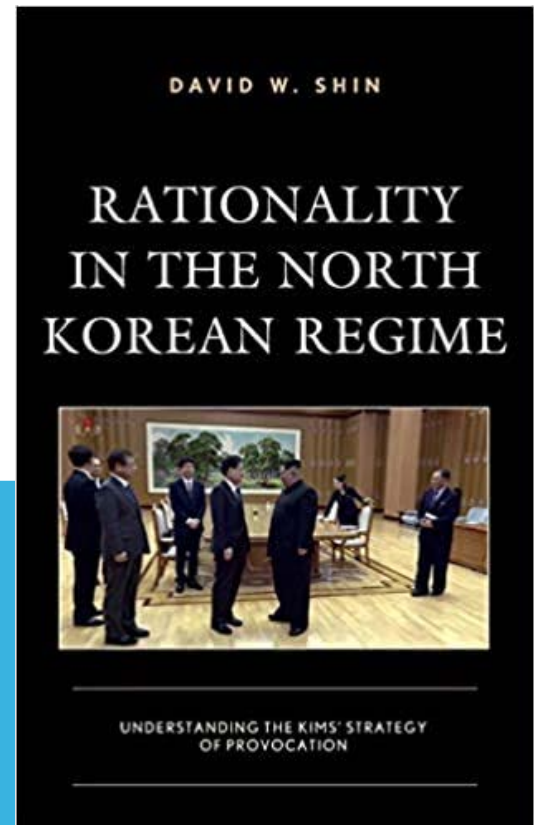
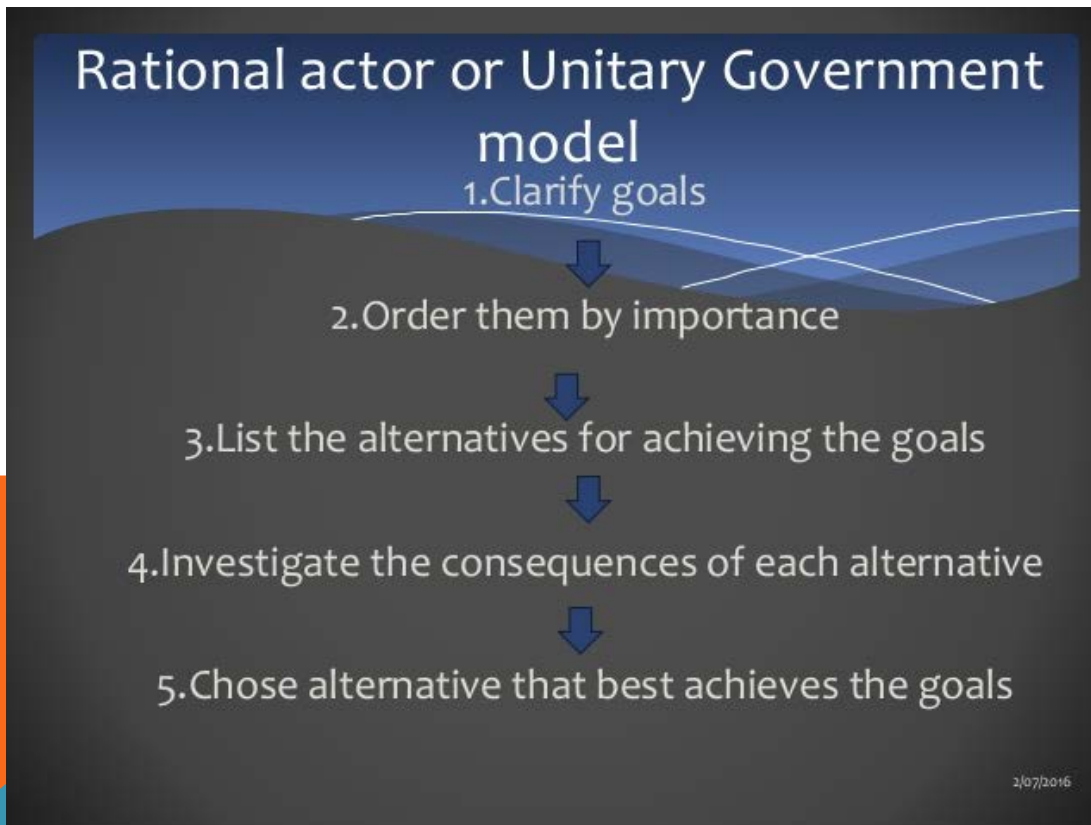


REALISM

Key Concepts

Rational Actor

Refers to the realist assumption that states generally pursue attainable, prudent goals that are commensurate with their power or capability to achieve.

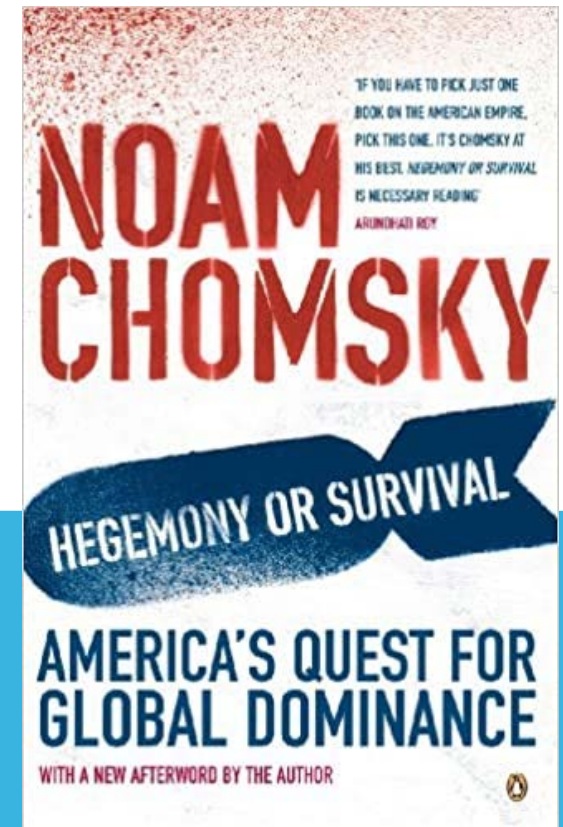


REALISM

Key Concepts

Hegemon (Hegemony)

A state with overwhelming military, economic, and political power that has the ability to maintain its dominant position in the international system.



REALISM

Key Concepts

Neo-realism

A variant of realism that contends that the struggle for power among states is the result of the anarchic structure of the international system as a whole, rather than some fundamental aspect of human nature.



Each state pursues its own interests, however defined, in ways it judges best. Force is a means of achieving the external ends of states because there exists no consistent, reliable process of reconciling the conflicts of interest that inevitably arise among similar units in a condition of anarchy.

— *Kenneth Waltz* —

REALISM

Critiques of Realist Theory



REALISM

Critiques of Realist Theory

In the contemporary world, can war be considered a natural extension of politics among nations, since nuclear weapons have made the pursuit of power using war essentially an unwinnable endeavor?



REALISM

Critiques of Realist Theory

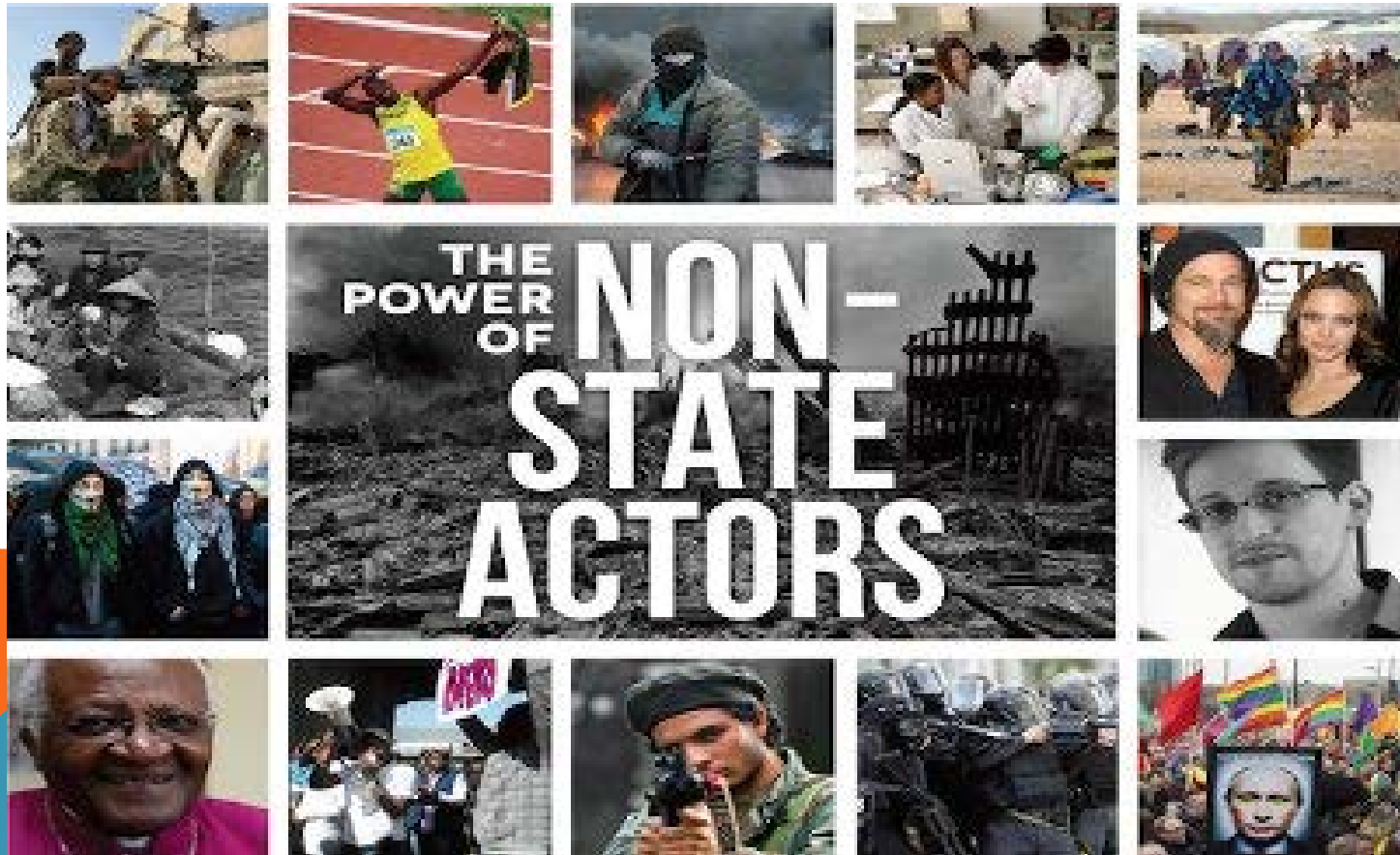
Realist theory tends to ignore the current expansion of cooperation between states.



REALISM

Critiques of Realist Theory

States are no longer the only important actors on the international stage.



REALISM

Critiques of Realist Theory

The increasing relevance of substate actors such as terrorists. Realists contend that states are the primary actors on the international stage and that all other identities are less important to our understanding of global affairs.



REALISM

Critiques of Realist Theory

A final weakness is the theory's inability to account for peaceful change.

