

# The Future of International Relations: A Symbiotic Realism Theory

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Hans Morgenthau once wrote that: “ [I]nternational relations is something not to be taken for granted, but something to be understood and to be changed and, more particularly, to be changed beyond the present limits of its political structure and organization. Here lies indeed the ultimate theoretical and practical justification for our interest in a theory of international relations.”

The field of International Relations (IR) today contains several general frameworks that seek to explain the workings of international relations and, to varying degrees, to contribute to efforts to move beyond the apparent confines of the current system. These approaches provide a variety of visions of the world, the most familiar of which is the realist view.

It is realism that has set the boundaries of the discipline, which has meant that IR has traditionally been concerned with the study of the inter-relationships between states. The conception of the world offered by realists is easy to grasp. Rational, calculating, and egoistic states are the most important actors in a nonhierarchical international system.

States’ survival strategies are based on amassing power and forming alliances against any state that threatens to upset the existing balance of power. Power politics is the name of the game and the game is zero-sum. That is, one state’s gain is another state’s loss. Moreover, under conditions of scarcity and international anarchy, morality is regarded as a statesperson’s folly.

I am under no illusion that morality and peace are possible without an overarching central and just authority or a benevolent hegemon. Given the powerful and innate survival instincts and drivers of behavior,

philosophers through the ages have recognized that some kind of central authority to prevent/arbitrate conflict and guarantee justice, security, peace, and prosperity is necessary. IR scholars are some of the most recent actors to attempt to grapple with these issues and to offer counsel to states in their relations with others.

Yet, as the discipline's dominant paradigm, realism emphasizes only some of the aspects of human nature that might motivate state behavior. Most realists assume that fear, reputation, and self-interest constitute the strongest motivating factors behind the actions of states. These impulses are thought to exist *a priori*.

In other words, interaction with other states is thus not expected to alter significantly a state's preferences, interests, or posture *vis-à-vis* their counterparts. Moreover, other possible motivating factors, such as the desire for justice, compassion, or legal responsibility, are assumed to be less important drivers of state behavior. An extremely narrow conception of human nature, therefore, underpins the realist worldview.

What is clearly missing from the realist paradigm are the substrates of human nature that require some concept of the perceptual frameworks and norms that inform relations between actors. I maintain that insights from neurobiology provide a more complete understanding of both human beings and states, and their relations.

Neurobiological conceptions of human nature are much broader than those of realism. A person's ego, for example, is not understood simply as the driver of domination and the pursuit of power, but also as the driver of a number of other traits, including the need for a positive identity and a sense of belonging. If such factors are taken into account, our understanding of human behavior, as well as the behavior of states, is substantially altered.

Realism's state-centrism also leads to a conception of the global system that is too narrow, resulting in the neglect of numerous non-state actors that help to account for the dynamics and relations inside the global system. Moreover, limiting the study of IR to the distribution of material capabilities between states neglects other types of power and motivators of action that constitute identities other than that of the rational, egoistic sovereign state — such as ethnic and gender identities. In my view, the conception of the global system must be widened and, moreover, an idealist dimension must be added to its ontology (i.e., what exists).


## THE PROBLEMS OF REALISM

Human nature in a realist vision of the world is driven by fear, reputation and self-interest, with very little place allotted to free will and, thus, for the capacity to alter one's nature. Any moral behavior that may be displayed is thought to result from self-interest rather than altruism. Since the state is believed to be the most important political unit, these characteristics are

transposed to the level of the state. A state is thought to be above all concerned with its own survival, which it attempts to secure through the accretion of power.

However, as one state accumulates power it makes others insecure and encourages them to do the same. In the absence of an overarching authority structure capable of guaranteeing the security of states, a permanent security dilemma is believed to be generated, and security competition becomes part of the natural order of things.

Realists believe that the security dilemma can be limited by a balance of power. The neo-realist scholar Kenneth Waltz, for example, contends that wherever two or more major powers exist, a balance of power will prevail. In his view, states tend to balance a growing power in order to prevent it from upsetting the status quo. Indeed, according to Waltz, the correct subject of study for IR is the study of the balance of power under conditions of international anarchy; and thus “high politics,” such as war, military alliances, and so on. The distribution of military power is thought to determine change and transformation in the international system.



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Since states are considered the principal actors in international politics, and they are presumed to be rational egoists, moral values are thought to belong solely to the domestic sphere. The self-interest of states negates agreement on universal moral principles.

Similarly, cooperative arrangements between states are thought to survive only for as long as states perceive them to be in their interest, and multilateral institutions are thought to exist at the whim of the interests of the major powers.

Yet, human nature is composed of a greater number of facets than those emphasized by realism. As is pointed out in symbiotic realism, the realist conception of human nature neglects those elements that require an ability to capture the manner in which perceptions and norms may alter behavior and may, indeed, be at least partly constitutive of self. This indicates that shifts in the distribution of military power may form only one explanation for change and transformation within the international system. Norms and perceptions are also likely to account for change and transformation.

Moreover, states can no longer ensure their security simply through self-help. Many of the threats that they face originate not from other states, but from non-state actors, many of whom may act transnationally. The increasing attention devoted to culture, for instance, reflects the importance

of large collective identities in global politics. We cannot afford to negate the importance of cultural issues in a world marked by increased human mobility and communications. When images can be broadcast simultaneously in various areas of the globe, the treatment or activities of a group could affect those of fellow members of the group in other countries.

Moreover, the dangers posed by non-state actors are in many instances non-military in nature. Today, national security analysts count the consequences of global warming, such as extreme weather and water shortage, as well as the spread of infectious disease, cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure, and so on, as potential threats to security.

High politics is therefore not necessarily the most effective focus of global politics. Moreover, events in one area of the world can have an almost immediate impact in another due to the rapidity and availability of information flows. Addressing the dangers posed by non-state actors requires cooperation with other states and a different range of “security tools” — not just military means.

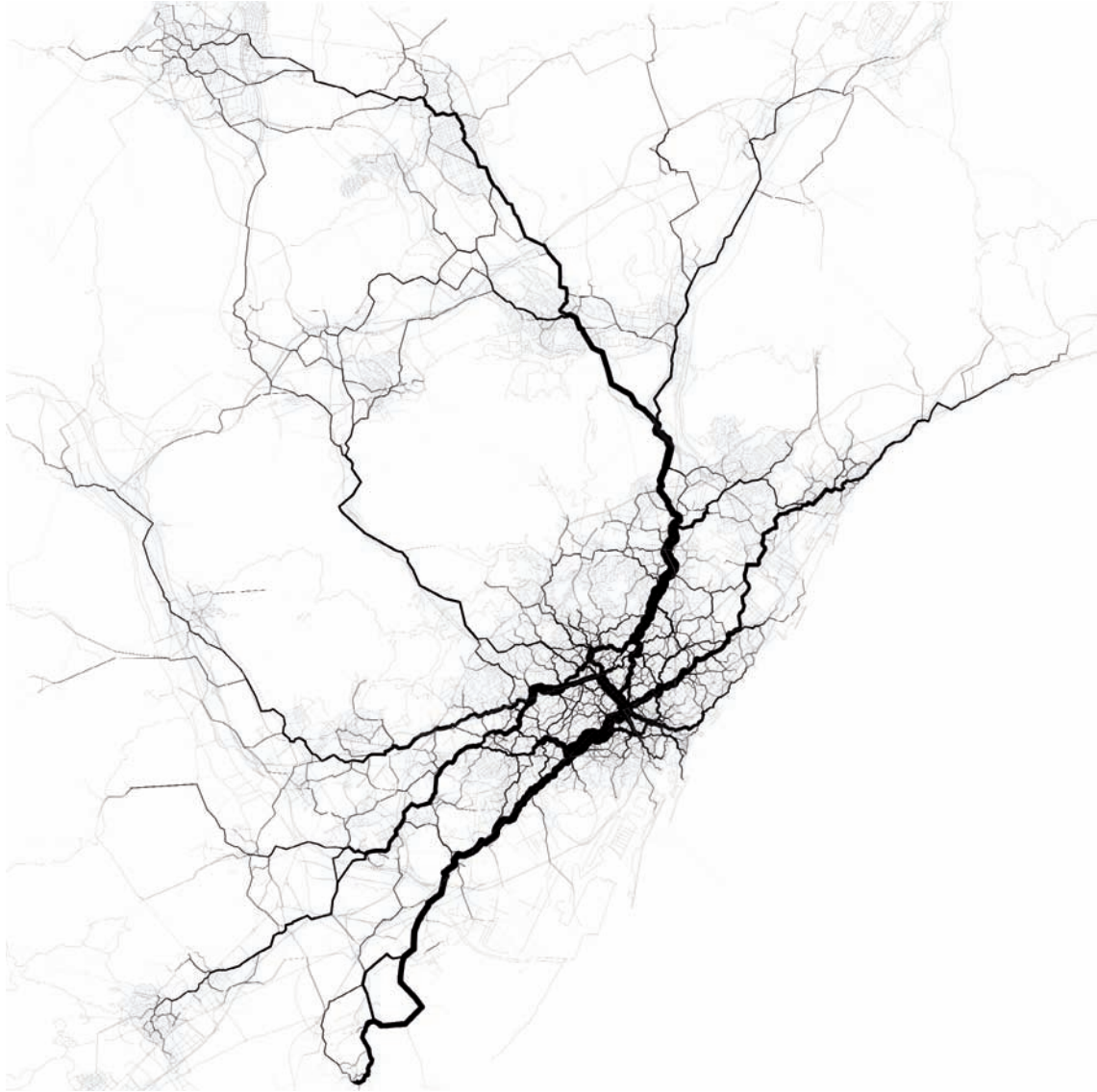
Given that security and prosperity are highly dependent on cooperative relations with other states, we cannot assume that relations between states are necessarily principally governed by competition. Increased interdependence means that absolute gains are possible and that global politics ought not to be *a priori* zero-sum as realism suggests. This implies that even if a state possesses a disproportionate degree of power, other states may not form alliances against it. Indeed, it is far more likely in today’s world that they would ally themselves with the most powerful state, if that power were constituted primarily through capacities other than solely military power.

Realists also assume that state power is derived from the control of resources. The need to control resources derives from the assumption that resources are scarce and that there exists no overarching authority to regulate their distribution. Competition for resources is, thus, presumed to be omnipresent. Yet, the validity of this assumption needs to be re-evaluated, given that technological advances may provide alternatives to currently scarce resources.

While natural resources, such as oil, remain highly relevant to a state’s situation in the global environment, a number of other “capacities” are also significant, as I have explained (Al-Rodhan 2009a). *Meta-geopolitics*, as I term it, ought to consider a number of facets of state power, including social issues and health, domestic politics, economics, the environment, science and human potential, military and security issues, and international diplomacy.

## **SYMBIOTIC REALISM AND THE INTERLOCKING DIMENSIONS OF AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD**

Symbiotic realism makes clear that the realist perception of competitive state relations, in which states are primarily concerned with relative gains in a self-help system, does not stand up to scrutiny. My conception of human nature tells us that perceptions are as important as



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material capabilities as motivators of state behavior. Moreover, given increased interdependence, states can engage in symbiotic relations, that is, they can take part in a relationship of mutual dependence that allows one state to gain more than another without deleterious effects.

This has several implications for realists. First, it means that absolute gains are possible and that the “game” of international relations is not necessarily zero-sum. Second, it implies

that even when a state is accruing a disproportionate amount of power (i.e., material capabilities), there is no reason to assume that other states will form alliances in an attempt to balance against it. Third, it implies that a responsible hegemon should accommodate the interests of other states and avoid threatening behavior or, as a number of neo-realist scholars have recently suggested, engage in a type of “offshore balancing.”

Moreover, some aspects of a state’s power may come from their capacity to lead through consent rather than coercion, which necessarily involves cognitive and normative schemes as well as material phenomena. This implies a type of hegemony. Symbiotic realism’s sensitivity to perceptual schemes and norms enables it to explain, as traditional realists cannot, why the US can lead without having to confront alliances of European states that attempt to balance against it. It can also suggest ways to avoid resistance to its overwhelmingly superior position in the global system.

A dual ontology also enables symbiotic realism to capture the sense in which large collective identities, whether substate or suprastate, are fluid rather than fixed entities: they are continually adapting to changing environments. Globalization is a key dimension that is helping to rapidly alter people’s environment. As a result of advances in technology, people can now be instantly connected with each other and images can be transmitted in no time across the globe, often with serious consequences. Human mobility has also intensified as people migrate to find work in other countries and travel with increasing ease from place to place.

What this means is that large collective identities are rubbing up against other large collective identities much more than was previously the case. This can cause members of these entities to feel threatened, disoriented, or marginalized. Large collective identities are, therefore, significant to the dynamics of the global system.

The neurobiological predilections of human nature indicate that the well-being of human beings depends in part on the possession of a positive identity and a sense of belonging. They also tell us that cultural arrogance and exceptionalism, which taken together may increase insecurity and the likelihood of conflict, are equally possible.

In a world in which human mobility is increasing and communications have enabled images to appear simultaneously in multiple areas of the globe, it is essential that human beings feel respected and valued, and that excesses, such as cultural arrogance, are guarded against. Today, we face the collective challenge of successfully managing relations between the cultural groups within societies and promoting at the very least peaceful coexistence between civilizations. Symbiotic realism argues that synergy should be the guiding principle in the search for better ways to manage culturally pluralistic societies and relations between cultures.

Transcultural synergy refers to a situation in which a plurality of cultures and civilizations has a net effect that is greater than that predicted on the basis of knowledge of the likely effects of individual cultures and civilizations. Indeed, it is possible that each large collective identity can

provide the stimulus to other collective identities that face similar challenges presented by the same tendencies of human nature and the same contexts of global anarchy and globalization.

Symbiotic realism attributes an important role to human nature. It adopts a broader conception of human nature informed by the insights of neurobiology. Within this view, people may be driven by basic instincts or higher aspirations. When survival is at stake, basic instincts take precedence. However, once basic needs are satisfied, humankind is capable of acting morally. Yet, it is important to remember that I am referring to the majority of people and that the moral capabilities of individuals also depend on upbringing, education and personal experience.

Clearly, the existence of governance mechanisms makes moral behavior more likely under international anarchy. Indeed, if people are generally capable of acting according to moral standards only when their basic needs are met, good global governance structures are essential.

In my view, states remain central actors in the global system. Yet, I do not assume that they are unitary actors that base their actions on rationally calculated interests. Some parts of the state may be involved in transnational networks, forming part of a governance structure that goes beyond the boundaries of the state but, at the same time, does not constitute a world state. State interests and preferences may also be modified by repeated interaction with other states. Both of these factors suggest that order may exist even in the absence of a sovereign world state.

In addition, military capabilities alone may not be enough to indicate a threat. There must also be a perception that a state's possession of military capabilities represents a threat. The security dilemma that is thought to exist in an internationally anarchic world order is thus not automatic and is likely to depend as much on threat perceptions as on actual military capabilities.

However, a focus on states is not sufficient, and a more comprehensive conception of the global system was sought for my theory. I consider large collective identities, whether subnational, transnational or supranational, to be important actors. They should not be conceived in a static way, but as fluid entities. They are not homogenous, but are likely to contain contradictions.

Moreover, a lack of attention to exchanges and instances of borrowing between geo-cultural domains can lead to cultural arrogance and the belief that each geo-cultural domain is self-sufficient, and that encounters with others implies conflict. Yet, if we look at the history of human civilization it becomes clear that cultures and geo-cultural domains have always overlapped and intersected in ways that cumulatively constructed human civilization. Awareness of this interconnectivity and mutual debt is essential as a means of undercutting arguments, such as Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis, that only risk becoming self-fulfilling. It is also



a highly useful means of “deconstructing” the exclusionary civilizational identities on which a great deal of history has been written.

In a highly interconnected world, multilateral institutions are important actors. While they are all too frequently held hostage to the whims of the most powerful states, this is often because of the manner in which institutional mechanisms and arrangements reflect power relations within the global political system. As is noted above, the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN were established by the victors of World War II and clearly reflect that fact.

Nevertheless, these institutions have a vital role to play in mediating relations between states as well as providing the means through which to tackle an array of problems that cannot be dealt with by any one state alone or through state-centric paradigms (e.g. health, environmental degradation, migration). They still form the central public elements of global governance and, as such, there is a greater possibility of holding them accountable, at least to their members. Multilateralism is also crucial for burden-sharing between states, and the need to find cooperative solutions to policy challenges. In addition, these institutions have played a key role in diffusing norms and principles.

NGOs also contribute to global governance and their role needs to be captured within a theoretical framework. Their memberships are transnational actors rather than states. This means that they are not subject to the same constraints as multinational institutions and, indeed, can claim to be more capable of representing people or causes that may be neglected by mainstream politics. Yet, NGOs were not only created to represent the less fortunate in society. Companies have come together to help to establish common standards, and professional bodies have developed transnational connections, forming organizational bodies to help them achieve their objectives.

Transnational corporations are generally understood to be firms that are based in one country and operate in another. However, they are also understood as companies that have affiliates abroad. Although they have existed since the nineteenth century, their phenomenal growth has been under way since the late twentieth century and is related to a restructuring of the global political economy.

Market deregulation and technological advances have created new possibilities for companies wishing to practice regulatory arbitrage. One of the consequences of this is that health and safety standards, and arguably wages, are under downward pressure, contributing to a decline in standards and well-being. This may be especially true of those working in sectors that rely on a heavy presence of foreign companies.

Symbiotic realism also classifies women as actors in and of themselves in order to make them more visible. Women are affected by and, at the same time, help to shape the global system in ways that may be quite different from those of men. At the most basic level, they have different access to health care and education. A recent Geneva Centre for the Democratic




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Control of Armed Forces report documents that the mortality rate of women is higher due to inadequate access to health care, for example. Reduced educational opportunities can also affect women's life expectancy. Lack of education could, for instance, increase the risk of death during childbirth as well as that of undernourishment. In short, women are a specific kind of actor and are all too often hidden from view because of what the traditional international relations paradigm has allowed one to "see."

Symbiotic realism identifies the environment as a “reactive actor,” because it responds, albeit in a non-conscious and non-rational way, to human activities. While human beings have affected the environment since the time they first appeared, the past century has been unprecedented in terms of their impact. This degree of human activity — particularly economic activity — in conjunction with population increases is prompting the environment to react in specific ways that are presently affecting and are likely to help shape the future global order. It is therefore essential to recognize the role that the environment plays in the international sphere.

Indeed, the environment is reacting in ways that may affect the sustainability of the present level of human civilization. Global climate change caused, according to the majority opinion in the scientific community, by the emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide is likely



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to result in a temperature rise of 2–9 degrees over the next fifty years. This will accelerate the melting of the polar ice caps, causing sea levels to rise. As a result, whole communities could be displaced and island states may disappear completely.

One of the difficulties of reducing environmental damage is the transnational nature of its impact. Moreover, damage to the environment is connected to practices that are embedded in the global political economy. Many actors that contribute to environmental degradation are the non-state actors that are hardest to regulate, most notably corporations. Successful regulation of the environment will require governance mechanisms that will have to be agreed multilaterally and in some instances transnationally, as well as enforcement mechanisms.

Adopting a dual ontology helps us to capture the substrates of human nature more adequately. I concede that human beings are, indeed, motivated by the satisfaction of human needs, ego, and fear. Yet, there are also ways in which inter-subjective meanings structure facets of ego that require idealist ontology. We need to be sensitive to the ways in which a person’s specific cultural, gender, and class identities, for instance, shape the way in which they experience the same thing or, in other words, to be able to acknowledge that there are many “truths.”

As a subset of technology, information and communications technology (ICT) is also considered to be a “reactive actor” by symbiotic realism. ICT has altered the rapidity with which

information and images can be diffused across the globe. The consequences of advances in this area have been felt in relation to global economic and financial market activities, travel and transportation, the increased relevance of the media and of public diplomacy, and the growth and risks related to cyberspace and the “blogosphere,” to name just a few. Regulation of ICT is difficult because of its widespread accessibility and the decentralized nature and potential anonymity of its users.

## **THE DYNAMICS OF THE GLOBAL SYSTEM**

According to symbiotic realism, the dynamics of the global system are the outcome of four interlocking dynamics — the neurobiological substrates of human nature, global anarchy, interdependence, and instant connectivity. Actors thus exist in particular conditions determined by the “state of nature” (SON).

### **Individuals**

Human beings are driven first and foremost by the satisfaction of their basic needs, including food, shelter, physical security, belonging and a positive self-identity. They are, thus, motivated by their emotional self-interest. Until their basic needs are satisfied, they are unlikely to be guided by conscious moral frameworks. Human insecurity and exploitation are likely to exist in an SON. As mentioned above, women both affect and are affected by the dynamics of the global system in gender-specific ways determined by their reduced/lack of status in many spheres of life.

### **States**

In an SON, states are likely to pursue their own self-interest, perceived as ensuring their own survival in conditions of international anarchy. National interest may, however, be defined not only by the external environment, but also by domestic actors or “penetration” by other states. Stephen Walt (2005) argues that “domestic political penetration” by other states helps to shape US foreign policy for the worse. ICT may also penetrate domestic politics in states and help to shape policy stances. Balancing behavior as a result of threat perceptions may also constitute part of state behavior in an SON.

### **International Organizations**

In an SON, cooperation between states within multilateral institutions is limited. States are, moreover, likely to be hostages to major powers, which are over-represented and enjoy privileged positions in multilateral institutions. Cooperation will prevail when it is in the perceived interests of these powers. NGOs have a greater ability to act impartially. They sometimes help to fill the

vacuum left by multilateral institutions. They also play a significant role in terms of raising consciousness and agenda-setting.

### **Large Collective Identities**

The basic need of human beings for a positive identity and belonging can, if not met, lead to exceptionalism, exclusion and alienation. The history of imperialism, cultural arrogance and exceptionalism that unfortunately persists today can lead to a sense of injustice and lack of recognition by those who feel pushed to the margins of global history. Increased interdependence and instant connectivity may add another dimension. Migration in the context of the global division of labor may bring people into close contact with “strangers” against a backdrop of socio-economic inequalities. Without sufficient awareness of different traditions and cultural values, this can lead to tension, particularly when exploited by those who wish to breed mistrust and fear for their own personal ends.

### **Transnational Corporations (TNCs)**

Without rules and regulations that specify otherwise, TNCs practice regulatory arbitrage. By relocating or establishing strategic alliances with other enterprises, they can move from one country to another where conditions are deemed more favorable. This capacity may result in a steady decline in labor conditions as governments seek to attract or keep TNCs on their territories. Thus, in an SON, TNCs may contribute to increased exploitation and to the pursuit of profit at all costs.

### **Environment and Natural Resources**

In an SON, a legal framework regulating activities that affect the environment is notoriously difficult to negotiate on a multilateral basis. These activities are embedded in the socio-economic and political structures of states. Ensuring economic prosperity forms part of the state’s national security considerations, which makes it particularly challenging for states to act on the basis of long-term considerations that may imply short-term costs on the part of companies. The scarcity of natural resources may also be aggravated by inadequate management strategies on the part of states.

### **ICT**

The enforced regulation of ICT is particularly difficult because of mass and instant access. Cybercrime is developing faster than the capacity of law enforcement agencies to combat it. As I noted in *The Emergence of Blogs as a Fifth Estate and Their Security Implications*, if cyberspace is insufficiently regulated, it can become a vehicle for personal attacks as well as state insecurity and intolerance.

## FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES

A great many of the foreign policy challenges faced by states today are the result of the emergence of norms that challenge traditional and narrow conceptions of state sovereignty, such as those centered on the individual as a subject of security. In addition, relative power remains a concern for states, but the context in which states act requires cooperation and a considerable degree of burden-sharing. Finally, finding the right balance between peaceful unity and respect for cultural differences is a challenge for states in the present context.

### Individuals

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights extended liberal political and civil rights to include economic and cultural rights. It enjoys widespread support, but people's human rights are still not universally respected. Challenges are posed by the conflicting principle of state sovereignty. Human rights are conceived as universal rights that belong to all individuals, although the continuation of particularistic national identities continues to compromise such rights, due to a lack of openness to international human rights pressure.

The international norms of sovereignty and non-intervention are more vigorously supported than those of human rights. There are, nevertheless, different interpretations of the scope and implications of sovereignty and non-intervention, and it is this fact that is likely to determine the extent to which the leaders of a particular state perceive a contradiction between sovereignty and international human rights norms.

Another matter alluded to above is the claim that human rights are not compatible with some non-Western cultures. In some instances, people may not be fully aware of cultural sensitivities, what may be feasible and when, and which actors may be best placed to progress particular rights, such as those of women.

### States

As is explained above, states in the realist paradigm are assumed to pursue their own material interests within an anarchical international system. These are, moreover, assumed to be concerned with relative as well as absolute gains. There is a tendency therefore for states to engage in short-term calculations of national interest. These calculations are assumed to be reached by rational assessments of the costs and benefits of various options. Yet, national interests may be derived through other mechanisms.

Walt (2005) proposes a slight modification to the realist viewpoint. He stresses the capacity of other states to penetrate the US domestically and influence foreign policy choices. Walt argues that this helps to account for foreign policy decisions that do not further the long-term interests of the US.

The notion of domestic penetration also highlights the way in which big business, for example, may influence domestic political decisions and thus it reinforces the importance of taking steps to minimize the role of money in politics. Transnational actors may also succeed in influencing the policies of national governments. Transnational corporations provide the most obvious example of this. What these instances imply is that the boundary between what has traditionally been thought of as “domestic” and “international” is artificial, and that it is no longer helpful to think in these terms.

Walt maintains that, historically, states have tended to try to balance the states that threaten to disrupt the existing balance of power. Yet, the relative absence of attempts by European states to balance the US in the post-Cold War era indicates that this assumption may not hold under all circumstances, and that there is no necessarily systematic nature to it. Walt’s answer to this is that rather than focusing on the shifts in power — conceived primarily in military terms — balance of power theorists ought to place threats at the center of their analysis. Thus conceived, there is no reason to expect European states to engage in balancing behavior in relation to the US.

In his view, the evidence suggests that states do not demonstrate a tendency to balance against rising powers that are not perceived as threatening. The significance of this should not be overlooked. It implies that if interstate relations are marked by good relations, the accumulation of power by one state need not imply instability. Moreover, it also highlights the importance of confidence-building measures and engagement in international relations. By not equating power with threat, Walt calls for a return to the US strategy of “offshore balancing,” which involves convincing others of the legitimacy of one’s policies.

Walt’s argument is useful to the extent that it calls into question the realist assumption that changes to and transformations of the international system are caused by shifts in the distribution of military power. Moreover, it also challenges the realist notion that gains are relative and therefore that international politics is a zero-sum game. Moreover, increased interdependence would tend to buttress this argument, given that states can only make gains in some instances by coordinating their responses.

Liberal international relations theorists would argue that the realist assumption that states are more concerned with relative gains is premised on the assumption that the “game” is played only once. They stress that where a game is repeatedly played, cooperative relations may be preferred. This implies that long-term absolute gains are given precedence over short-term relative gains. Iterative relations enable the leaders of states to perceive the long-term absolute gains from cooperative relations as fairly certain.

Prioritizing absolute gains over relative gains within the liberal perspective relies on there already being repeated relations. Where states are poorly integrated into the multilateral arrangements that might provide the means with which to influence outcomes that affect them, we might expect relative gains to be privileged.



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Where a state uses its resources to engage in bargaining rather than to secure long-term cooperation with other states, relative gains are likely to be emphasized. In such instances, short-term gains are privileged over longer-term gains. This may be driven by the domestic political situation. If a regime or a country's leaders seek to bolster their legitimacy by short-term gains, it may be unlikely that gains will be deferred.

There is also the variable of the accountability of leaders to their publics. Whether leaders are seeking immediate electoral gains may have an impact on their calculations. It may also be



that the long-term gains are small or uncertain. If a state feels that it has little capacity to affect its long-term benefits, it may opt for maximum short-term gains.

### **International Organizations**

It is important that multilateral solutions are favored over unilateral solutions. For most states this is likely to be the case given the transnational nature of many policy issues and the futility of trying to address them alone. Yet, this may not be the case for states that are inadequately integrated into the multilateral system and maintain a highly particularistic conception of national interests. Unilateral responses to problems are even more damaging to the credibility of multilateral institutions. An added challenge to multilateral institutions stems from their unrepresentative nature. These institutions may therefore be regarded by many as lacking in legitimacy and reflecting the preferences of the dominant states.

### **Large Collective Identities**

Foreign policy choices may negatively affect transcultural relations by fuelling the grievances of members of large collective identities. Policies that create or sustain injustices experienced by a group are unlikely to be in the long-term interests of a state. This is because the need for a stable identity and for a sense of community is vital to human dignity. If people or members of one's community suffer persistent humiliation, the appeal of extremism is likely to be greater. Even ordinary citizens may condone terrorism, for example, as a means of punishing those actors that they perceive as responsible for sustaining the status quo. The difficulty for the state is to achieve the appropriate balance between societal cohesion and solidarity, and the preservation of cultural identities.

### **Environment and Natural Resources**


Environmental degradation does not only affect a country's economic growth, it affects its security too. Environmental degradation may contribute to conflicts over resources, the displacement of people, the destruction of livelihoods and damage to health. The interconnection between the environment, political economy and security means that protection of the environment should form part of a country's policy considerations, not simply in the area of development but also in the area of security. Successful management of the natural resource base on which a country's political stability rests is a foreign policy concern.

### **ICT**

New technologies mean that news can be transmitted at a much faster pace than before — either through 24-hour news channels or using the Internet. This has meant that the media is often used by policymakers to diffuse messages. However, in some instances, this may prompt

policymakers to respond too rashly to events. The public may also rely on Internet news sources that are not mediated by journalists who may at least make some effort to corroborate their stories. Policymakers need to be aware of such sources.

Widespread access, anonymity and the speed with which information can be diffused through the Internet also pose challenges to efforts to prevent it from being employed for nefarious means, such as spreading hatred and inciting violence. Efforts to regulate ICT need to be balanced with the need to allow freedom of expression. Public authorities must find equilibrium between efforts to prevent violence, hatred and intolerance, and efforts to allow freedom of speech.



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## THE WAY FORWARD

Symbiotic realism provides a normative framework to help guide policymakers in a world that is driven by the dynamics created by the substrates of human nature, formal anarchy, interdependence and instant connectivity.

### Individuals

The promotion and protection of human rights must form part of the promotion of security. Yet, this needs to be done in ways that are culturally sensitive and empowering. A people-centered conception of security would provide a framework for the consistent promotion and protection of human rights broadly defined. Human security defined as freedom from want and fear is broad enough to include political, civil, socio-economic and cultural rights. Yet, human security ought to include the promotion of a positive sense of self as well.

While human rights offer an effective means of promoting the well-being of the individual, efforts to promote human rights may be viewed with suspicion. It is therefore important to remember that “humility, understanding, patience, dialogue, and time are all crucial aspects of encouraging the emergence of endogenous convictions, players, and process that take into account historical and cultural specificities” (Al-Rodhan 2009a). Placing the emphasis on human dignity may provide a means of promoting the fundamental principles underlying human rights in a way that is compatible with all moral lexicons.

## The State

International anarchy does not have to imply perpetual insecurity, competitive relations and relative rather than absolute gains. Despite the absence of an overarching authority structure, governance mechanisms that regulate state relations do exist, for instance, in the form of international law and soft law comprising good practices and standard setting. There is thus governance without a world government, however imperfect this may be. Moreover, increased interdependence between states means that absolute gains are more likely to be recognized.

Indeed, increased interdependence makes symbiotic relations between states possible. Employed in relation to state-to-state relations, symbiosis may be understood as an interstate relationship in which one party benefits more than the other party, but does not have to imply a serious disadvantage for the less fortunate state let alone an absolute loss.

If there is no “logic” within the international system that implies a perpetual security dilemma, there is no reason to assume that morality has no place in global politics. States often comply with humanitarian norms, and they have reacted to enforce anti-genocide norms, even in the absence of enforcement mechanisms. Moreover, as is suggested above, interaction between states is repeated, implying that greater trust and shared norms may help to reduce insecurity in an anarchic international system.

Symbiotic relations do, nevertheless, depend on a prior degree of integration. In terms of political integration, the leaders of states need to calculate that the long-term absolute gains bring more than the short-term relative gains, and that they have the capacity to influence decisions that affect them. This implies that states need to be well represented in multilateral institutions and arrangements. The accountability of leaders to their public is also likely to reduce short-term calculations. Good governance, which entails accountability, should be promoted, but in a way that is sensitive to local political and cultural structures.

## Large Collective Identities

Greater efforts need to be made to construct a shared consciousness based on the compatibility of fundamental moral principles. Synergy is suggested as a guiding principle for states faced with the challenge of successfully managing culturally plural societies. Intra-civilizational synergy should be sought. Synergy occurs where the effect of two entities, influences or agents is greater than that which could have been predicted from the known effects of each.

Synergy relies on there being a certain degree of transcultural understanding. Dialogue and engagement are essential parts of foreign policy. Active measures to promote the spread of knowledge aimed at encouraging peaceful transcultural relations should also be employed.

Rapid changes are underway that are altering traditional structures and reference points. However, the focus in the West, particularly in relation to Islam, is often on extremism. Yet, the

peaceful and moderate majority should not be confused with extremist groups. Combating extremism will rely on addressing its root causes, and reducing poverty and marginalization. The appeal of the extremist has to be dented. Solutions to the problems of extremism that are indigenously conceived are likely to be more successful than those imposed from the outside. There should therefore be a constructive effort made to support and help finance local initiatives aimed at reducing the appeal of extremism.

The promotion of justice also needs to form an important part of foreign policy. Injustice can lead people to feel alienated from their societies. Those who seek to propagate extremist ideologies are most likely to be successful wherever injustice exists and there are no apparent mechanisms to remedy that injustice. Greater justice needs to be promoted.

### **International Organizations**

Multilateral institutions need to be more representative so that all member states feel that they constitute an effective forum in which they can further their interests in a cooperative manner. Similarly, the special privileges attributed to major powers must be eliminated so that multilateral institutions are not perceived as mere instruments of the powerful. It is also important that the less powerful members of an institution are included in the design process for any reforms. In order to encourage such states to opt for cooperative relations, policymakers need to support measures to ensure that all members of multilateral institutions are represented.

### **The Environment and Natural Resources**

Protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development require cooperation and burden-sharing between states, multinational institutions, NGOs, social movements and the scientific community. The scientific community will play a key role in presenting information on the impact of environmental degradation in a clear and scientific manner to policymakers and the general public. States need to publicly fund studies on the environment so that scientists and the public can make informed choices and hold politicians accountable. Yet, the capacity of politicians to curb environmental degradation is sometimes constrained by the role played by money in electoral and political systems. The influence of industrial lobbies needs to be reduced.

Investment in substitutes for natural resources that are likely to run out in the near future needs to be made now. Reducing the depletion of natural resources also requires lifestyle changes, particularly in the developed countries.

### **ICT**

The 2003 Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe's Convention on Cyber Crime provides a model for enacting legislation that makes the spread of hatred and incitement to violence via the Internet a criminal offence. Regional efforts to regulate ICT ought to be coordinated with

global efforts. There is also a need to engage in dialogue over the normative basis for regulation, as well as what constitutes the “right balance” between efforts to regulate the harmful use of the Internet and the right to freedom of expression. The tools with which to survey and encourage greater responsibility on the part of Internet users, such as bloggers, also need to be developed. Bloggers, for example, could be required to reveal their real name when they register, but use a pseudonym when they write.

## CONCLUSIONS

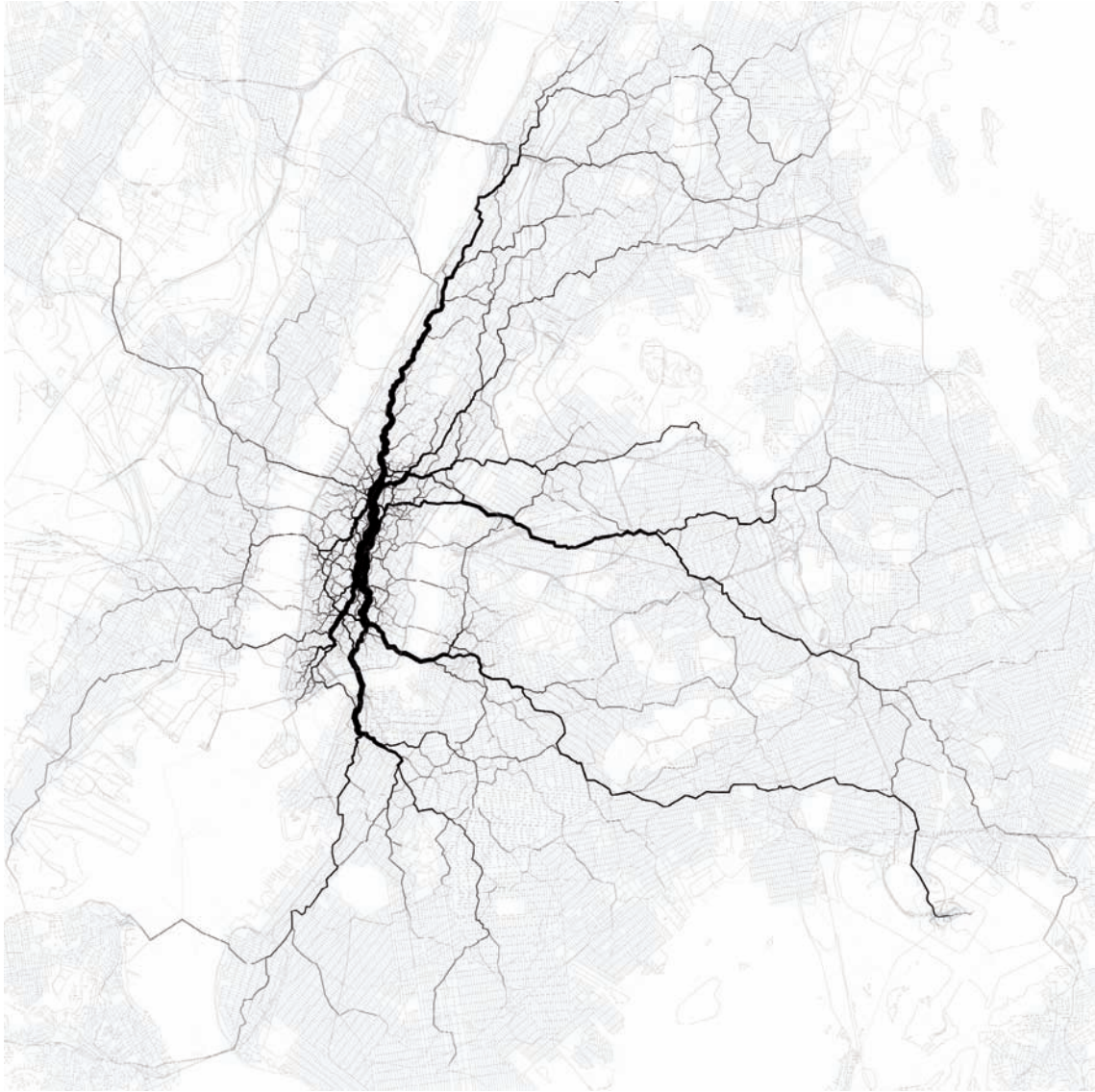
Based on my conception of human nature and globalization in a nonhierarchical global system, I propose a more comprehensive vision of the dimensions and dynamics of our interconnected world, which I call *symbiotic realism*. In this approach the major actors are believed to be: 1) the individual; 2) the state; 3) large collective identities; 4) international organizations (multilateral institutions and NGOs); 5) transnational corporations; 6) the environment; 7) natural resources; 8) women; and 9) ICT.

Symbiotic realism seeks to go beyond the state centrism of realism to focus on the predilections of human nature, global anarchy, interdependence and instant connectivity. It identifies a number of non-state actors such as large collective identities, international organizations and transnational corporations as important in helping to shape the global system. Foreign policy challenges include overcoming the tension between narrow conceptions of state sovereignty and international norms that shift the focus to the security of the individual.

We might also imagine an increasing tension arising between the principle of state sovereignty and concern for the protection of the biosphere. Unequal power relations between states and a continued emphasis on relative gains also pose considerable challenges to the need for cooperative and coordinated responses to today’s problems, which require an emphasis on burden-sharing and absolute gains. In addition, there is a need to achieve a correct balance between respect for cultural specificities and the identification of common fundamental values.

Symbiotic realism’s focus on the four dimensions mentioned above offer a paradigm with which to overcome these challenges. It suggests that emphasis should be placed on the promotion of human dignity, symbiotic relations between states premised on absolute gains, the promotion of justice and transcultural synergy.

Symbiotic realism recognizes the difficulty of engaging in moral behavior in the absence of an overarching just authority or a responsible hegemon. Innate survival instincts and motivators of behavior have prompted IR scholars to wrestle with these issues in an effort to offer guidance to states in their relations with others. I point out, however, that realism identified only some of the important motivators of human nature and of states.



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Substrates of human nature that require recognition of the importance of perceptual frameworks and norms are lacking. Insights from neurobiology, I contend, provide a more complete picture of the predilections of human nature and have important implications not only for how I conceive of individuals and states, but also for how I identify relevant actors and the significance of international anarchy. I also argue that the interdependence and instant connectivity linked to globalization are central to gaining an understanding of the implications of human nature and global anarchy.

Specifically, symbiotic realism helps to explain why the US, for example, can lead without having to confront alliances from other major powers. It also indicates that a hegemony based on consent may provide the best means at present of mitigating the consequences of the interlocking dimensions of human nature, globalization, and global anarchy.

A dual ontology also enables symbiotic realism to capture the sense in which large collective identities, whether substate or supracountry, are fluid entities that are continually adapting to changing environments, part of which entails rubbing up against other collective identities as a result of instant interconnectivity and intensified human mobility. Collective identities are significant to the dynamics of the global system because human beings have a desire for a positive identity and a sense of belonging, but are also capable of cultural arrogance and exceptionalism, which taken together may heighten insecurity and the likelihood of conflict.

Symbiotic realism outlines a governance structure that takes into account the predilections of human nature as I define them, together with global anarchy, an intensified interdependence, and instant interconnectivity. At the individual level, it proposes a domestic governance structure that includes, but goes beyond, traditional liberal rights to incorporate dignity, inclusion and freedom from fear and want.

At the interstate level, it proposes a symbiosis, which refers to situations in which a relationship of mutual dependence can allow one state to gain more than another without causing insecurity. This implies, first, that absolute gains are possible and that the “game” of international relations is not necessarily a zero-sum one. Second, it suggests that under conditions of interdependence, states are unlikely to engage in balancing behavior. Third, this implies that a responsible hegemon should accommodate the interests of other states and avoid threatening behavior.

At the global level, I suggest that states should work together multilaterally — with international organizations — in order to advance a more just and environmentally sustainable global order. At the transcultural level, I argue that relations between diverse cultures should be guided by the principle of synergy, which implies that a plurality of cultures and subcultures will have a greater net effect than any one geo-cultural domain alone.

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REALISM HAS DOMINATED THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND A GREAT DEAL OF FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY THINKING. IN GENERAL, STATES ARE ASSUMED TO BE UNITARY RATIONAL EGOISTS, BEHAVING ON THE BASIS OF RATIONALLY CALCULATED DECISIONS ABOUT OUTCOMES THAT MAXIMIZE SELF-INTEREST. IN ORDER TO ENSURE THEIR CONTINUED SURVIVAL, A STATE'S PRIMARY CONCERN IS THOUGHT TO BE TO AMASS POWER AND TO FORM ALLIANCES AGAINST ANY STATE THAT THREATENS TO UPSET THE ESTABLISHED POWER BALANCE. IN THE ABSENCE OF AN OVERARCHING AUTHORITY CAPABLE OF ENFORCING COMMITMENTS, MANAGING CONFLICT AND PROVIDING SECURITY, MORALITY IS BELIEVED TO HAVE NO PLACE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. BASED ON HIS CONCEPTION OF HUMAN NATURE, GLOBALIZATION, AND THE INADEQUACY OF REALISM, IN A CONNECTED, INTERDEPENDENT, NON-HIERARCHICAL WORLD, NAYEF AL-RODHAN PROPOSES A MORE COMPREHENSIVE THEORY OF THE DIMENSIONS AND DYNAMICS OF OUR GLOBAL SYSTEM, CALLED *SYMBIOTIC REALISM*. IN THIS THEORY, I EXPAND THE GLOBAL UNITARY ACTORS TO INCLUDE: 1) THE INDIVIDUAL; 2) THE STATE; 3) LARGE COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES; 4) INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS AND NGOs); 5) TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS; 6) THE ENVIRONMENT; 7) NATURAL RESOURCES; 8) WOMEN; AND 9) INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY. THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS NEEDS TO BE SEEN THROUGH THIS SYMBIOTIC REALISM FRAMEWORK, TO INSURE A MORE JUST AND SUSTAINABLE GLOBAL ORDER FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS, STATES AND CULTURES.

# BIOGRAPHY

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