

DEFINITION OF PRINCIPAL TERMS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Part I: The Nation-State

1. **State**: a large social system with a set of rules that are enforced by a permanent administrative body (government). That body claims and tries to enforce **sovereignty**. That is, the **state** claims to be the highest source of decision-making of the social system within its jurisdiction, and it rejects outside interference in making or enforcing its set of rules. The many smaller systems within the **state** are not sovereign, nor are large international organizations like the United Nations, since states routinely reject their authority. The **state** is a political concept that refers to the exercise of power or the ability to make and enforce rules.
2. **Sovereign**: ultimate power to control people and events within the area of the state.
3. **Nation**: a group of individuals who feel that they have so much in common (interests, habits, ways of thinking, and the like) that they should all become a particular state. Unlike the term state, the term nation refers to the subjective feelings of its people. By this definition almost all the present nations would like to become nation-states, but many nations are actually parts of other states, and many states are not nation-states. On the whole, nation-states can count on much greater loyalty from their citizens than states that contain many nations, and this gives them greater strength in their international dealings. (As you can see, the term “international” should really be “interstate”).
4. **Society**: the population controlled by a state, or the population that forms a nation, or both. Some societies are territorially limited to a single geographical area and a single state while others are not. The term society, unlike the terms state and nation, is not limited to a single definition because societies overlap with different states and nations.
5. **Country**: a well-defined geographical area. The term simply refers to a spatial concept.
6. **Peace of Westphalia, 1648**: event generally identified as marking the end of the medieval order and the beginning of the European centered, ***nation-state based***, balance-of-power system which characterized international political behavior until 1914.

Part II: The International System:

1. **Geopolitics:** refers to the role of geographic factors in international politics. Not as much attention is given to this in the late 20th Century because industrialization and technological advance has reduced the potency of geographic barriers to human movement in commerce and military action.
2. **World System:** a set of interconnected societies. The state of being of each of these societies depends to some extent on its relative position in the world system, which has strong, middling and weak members. The world system of 1900 was a capitalist system. During most of the 20th Century there was a capitalist world system and some competitors who challenged its hegemony. In the late 20th Century, there is again simply a capitalist world system.
3. **Core Societies:** economically diversified (in the 20th Century that means industrialized), rich and powerful societies that are relatively independent of outside control.
4. **Peripheral Societies:** economically overspecialized, relatively poor and weak societies that are subject to manipulation or direct control by core powers.
5. **Semi-Peripheral Societies:** societies that are trying to industrialize and/or diversify their economies. While they are weaker than core societies, they are not as subject to outside manipulation as peripheral societies.
6. **Interdependence:** two or more nation-states which are mutually dependent, i.e. national populations become closely linked through international transactions. The notion of independence of any society is totally relative in this century. Not even the core societies are truly independent because their strength depends, in part, on control of resources that come from peripheral and semi-peripheral areas.
7. **Sensitivity:** two or more nation-states are in a position of mutual dependence by choice.
8. **Vulnerability:** nation-states are in a position in which there are no readily available alternatives to the situation of mutual dependence in which they find themselves.

Part III: Competing World Views:

In preparing to study international relations, emphasis must be placed on the constant tension between facts and interpretation. If our study of international relations required only facts, we could potentially all have the same understanding of world politics. *Facts do not speak for themselves, however.* They are organized by concepts, structured by theories, interpreted by worldviews and evaluated in the light of individual and subjective value systems.

1. **Realism:** portrays the world political system as an anarchic struggle for power and security among competing states. No higher authority exists than these states. Thus states individually, or in alliance with other states, provide for their own defense. Power is the only effective means of assuring security. Security follows from vigilance willingness to act prevent any state from achieving a preeminent and threatening position.
2. **Idealism-Liberal Internationalism:** suggests that there are reasons to believe that the dominant global role of states might be weakening. International institutions, international law and international commerce all contribute to the developing global community. Thus, we should describe the world *not only* in terms of state interaction but also in terms of increasing community.
3. **Radicalism:** Understands the world as organized according to capitalist imperatives. International relations are highly stratified and dominated by the unequal relationship between the industrialized and developing worlds. Radical, systemic change is necessary in order to achieve security on a global basis---a security understood as based on the satisfaction of basic needs for the world's population regardless of their national identity.
4. **Thomas Theorem:** "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."