



## Marxist Theory of IR

### A Radical Lens on Global Politics

The **Marxist theory of IR** begins with a powerful accusation: both **liberals and realists purposefully divert attention from real issues**.

Where liberals talk about institutions and cooperation, and realists talk about states and power, Marxists ask a deeper question — *who controls the wealth? who benefits? who suffers?*

For Marxists, international politics is not really about diplomacy or war; it is about **global exploitation**, class dominance, and the unequal distribution of resources.

### Rejecting “International Politics”

Marxists even avoid using the term **International Politics (IP)**.

Why?

Because the word “politics” hides the economic forces that truly shape the world.

Instead, they use **International Economic Theory** — a term that exposes **structural inequalities in global politics**.

This shift in language matters.

It tells us that states are not equal players at a table. Some are rich. Some are poor. Some control capital. Others provide labour. Global structures benefit a few and marginalise many.

### Why Marxists Reject Liberal and Realist Narratives

Marxists argue that:

Realists focus on states to hide class domination.

Liberals focus on institutions to hide global capitalism.

Both, they claim, **mask the economic**

**exploitation** that drives conflict, underdevelopment and dependency.

Marxists instead highlight:

the power of multinational corporations,

the exploitation of the Global South,

colonial and neo-colonial practices,

and the class nature of global institutions like the IMF and World Bank.

### The Marxist Promise

The Marxist theory of IR forces us to change our angle of vision.

It tells us that to understand war, peace, development or poverty, we must look not at flags and armies, but at **capital, class, labour and dependency**.

It insists that the global system is not neutral — it is built to preserve the interests of those who control wealth.

### Marx

### Proletarian Internationalism — A Global Fight Against Exploitation

For **Karl Marx**, the international arena was not about diplomats, borders or treaties. It was about **class struggle on a global scale**. He argued that capitalism is not confined within national boundaries. It spills across continents, searching for new markets, cheaper labour and fresh resources.

This expansion is not accidental — it is **the inherent expansionist nature of capitalism**.

Capitalism must expand or collapse.

And this expansion drives **global conflict, imperialism and exploitation**.



### Workers of the World Unite

Marx believed that workers everywhere — whether in Europe, Asia, Africa or Latin America — share the same struggles:

long hours,  
low wages,  
alienation,  
and the power of capital over their lives.

Thus he proposed **proletarian internationalism** — the idea that the working class across the world must unite, because their enemy is not another nation, but the **global capitalist class**.

This was revolutionary:  
instead of nation versus nation, Marx saw **class versus class**, across borders.

### Why Capitalism Creates Global Conflict

Capitalist states and corporations rush outward because they need:

new markets,  
raw materials,  
cheap labour,  
investment opportunities,  
and territories to dominate.

This expansion produces wars, colonialism, debt traps and economic domination.

What realists call “national interest,” Marx calls **capitalist interest disguised as nationalism**.

### Why Marx Still Matters

Even today, when we talk about:  
global supply chains,  
sweatshops,  
multinational corporations,  
resource extraction,  
neocolonialism,  
IMF conditionalities—  
we are speaking the language of Marx.

He tells us that international politics is not just

about power; it is about **profit, exploitation and global class relations**.

### Lenin

#### Theory of Imperialism — Capitalism's Final, Violent Stage

For **Vladimir Lenin**, international politics in the early 20th century could be understood through one brutal truth: **imperialism is not a choice — it is the highest stage of capitalism**. When capitalism matures inside a country, profits begin to stagnate. Firms become monopolies. Banks merge with industries. Capital needs new places to expand.

So where does it go?

**Beyond borders.**

Lenin argued that great powers are driven outward by economic necessity, not moral purpose. They are not spreading civilisation or democracy — they are spreading **capitalism by force**.

#### WWI as a War for Colony

Lenin shocked the world when he said:

**World War I is not a war for honour or security — it is a war for colony.**

It was the clearest example of imperialist states fighting to capture:

markets,  
raw materials,  
shipping routes,  
labour pools,  
and territories.

Britain, Germany, France and others were not clashing for ideology. They were clashing because each wanted to dominate the world economy.

For Lenin, WWI exposed the **true, predatory face**



of capitalism.

### **Imperial Rivalries — Competition Turned Violent**

Lenin showed how **imperial rivalries emerge from the search for markets and raw materials**.

When every major power expands outward to feed its capitalist system, they inevitably collide.

This creates:

colonialism,  
military occupation,  
arms races,  
and finally, global war.

In Lenin's view, imperialism is not an accident of foreign policy. It is the **logical outcome of capitalist expansion**.

### **Why Lenin Still Speaks to Today's World**

When we analyse:

resource wars,  
energy politics,  
debt traps,  
neocolonial interventions,  
competition for Africa,  
U.S.–China rivalry—  
we see Lenin's logic still alive.

He taught us that beneath the flags and speeches, **global capitalism and its hunger for expansion** shape the deepest conflicts of international politics.

### **Instrumentalist or Dependency School**

### **Understanding the New Face of Colonialism**

The **instrumentalist or dependency school** steps into IR with a sharp, unapologetic accusation: **colonialism never ended — it only changed its**

**form.**

Instead of soldiers and flags, today's empires operate through banks, markets, corporations and global financial rules.

This school therefore focuses on **neo-colonialism** — the subtle, economic domination of developing countries by wealthy nations and multinational institutions.

### **The Core Argument — Structural Dependence**

Dependency theorists argue that **global economic structures keep poorer states dependent**.

Even when countries gain political independence, they remain trapped in economic relationships that favour the rich and weaken the poor. Why?

Because the global system is designed to:  
provide raw materials from the South,  
deliver manufactured goods from the North,  
keep prices low for the North,  
keep labour cheap in the South,  
and ensure profits flow upward.

This creates a world where the prosperity of the centre depends on the **underdevelopment** of the periphery.

### **How Neo-Colonialism Works**

Instead of colonial rule, dependency scholars highlight instruments such as:  
multinational corporations controlling resources,  
IMF and World Bank conditionalities,  
unfair trade rules,  
debt traps,  
technology dependence,  
capital flight.

These mechanisms ensure that wealth moves from the South to the North — continuously,



predictably and structurally.

For the dependency school, the tragedy is clear: developing countries are not *failing*; they are being **kept dependent**.

### Why This School Matters

The dependency perspective forces IR students to shift from analysing borders and states to examining:

global supply chains,  
terms of trade,  
financial flows,  
and corporate power.

It exposes the hidden hierarchy of the international system — showing that inequality is not an accident but a consequence of **structural design**.

### Immanuel Wallerstein

#### World Systems Theory — A Global View of Inequality

**Immanuel Wallerstein** revolutionised IR by insisting that what we call “international politics” is not a collection of independent events.

Rather, **IP is not independent event** — it is part of a single, interconnected **world system**.

This system has a structure, a history and a logic that shape how power and wealth move across the globe.

Wallerstein argued that to understand war, development, trade or poverty, you must look not at states individually but at the **global economic system** they are embedded in.

### Two Models of the World System

#### 1. The Political World System (up till 17th century)

Before the modern era, the world was organised through a **political world system**.

Here, the centre of power — like the **Roman Empire** — extracted wealth from the **peripheries**. Peripheries paid tribute, taxes or labour, and the **redistribution by empire** created order.

The empire decided who gets what, who rules where, and how resources flow.

Power came from territory, armies and imperial control.

#### 2. The Economic World System (since 17th century)

From the 17th century onward, the world transformed into an **economic world system**.

This shift coincided with capitalism’s rise in Europe.

Now, instead of empires redistributing wealth, it was **the market** that performed redistribution.

Wallerstein’s insight is profound:

**redistribution by market replaced redistribution by state.**

Under capitalism,

centre (core) countries specialise in high-value production,

periphery countries specialise in raw materials and cheap labour,

and semi-periphery countries sit between the two.

This economic structure determines political behaviour:

colonialism, trade, wars, development gaps, and dependency all flow from the logic of the capitalist world system.



### Why Wallerstein Matters

Wallerstein teaches us that global inequality is not random.

It is **systemic**.

It is **historically produced**.

And it is sustained by an international division of labour that keeps wealth flowing from periphery to core.

It is one of the most powerful Marxist interpretations of the global order.

### Features of the System – Spatial

Features of the World System – Spatial Dimension

#### Core Regions — The Command Centres of Capitalism

In Wallerstein's **world systems theory**, the **core regions** sit at the top of the global hierarchy. These regions possess overwhelming **economic, military and technological power**, most of which has historically been **concentrated in the West**.

They control high-value industries, set global rules, dominate finance, and shape global norms. Core states house the bourgeoisie who benefit the most from the capitalist world economy.

#### Semi-Peripheries — The Club of Non-Elites

Below the core lies the **semi periphery**, a small group of emerging economies, many located in the **Global South**, such as **BRICS** countries.

They occupy an intermediate position:

they specialise in **manufacturing**,

offer a vast **labour force**,

attract **investment**,

and maintain a **stable political environment** to support global production chains.

Wallerstein calls them the **club of non elites**.

They **help the bourgeoisie in the core** by absorbing shocks and contradictions of capitalism.

They also function as **cushion** between core and periphery, preventing direct confrontation.

Crucially, semi-peripheries serve as an **escape route for the West**:

they provide **cheap labour**,

allow the **profitable use of outdated technology**, and host **polluting industries** that are rejected by powerful **civil society movements** in Western countries.

So, semi-peripheries protect the core's prosperity while sharing none of its power.

#### Peripheries — The Raw Material Suppliers

At the bottom of the system lie the **peripheries** — the poorest regions of the world.

Their role is brutally simple:

they **supply raw materials**,

export primary goods,

and depend heavily on external markets and capital.

Most **African** and **South American** countries fall into this category.

Their economies remain vulnerable, dependent and structurally tied to the needs of the core.

They suffer low wages, weak institutions, commodity dependence and economic instability — not because they failed, but because the **world system needs them to remain peripheries**.

#### Why This Spatial Hierarchy Matters

Wallerstein's spatial analysis exposes the global architecture of inequality.

Core–semi-periphery–periphery is not a natural order; it is **historically produced**, **systemically maintained**, and **functionally necessary** for global capitalism.

It reveals why development and



underdevelopment are two sides of the same world system.

## Features of the World System

### – Temporal Dimension

#### Every System Has a Life Cycle

Wallerstein emphasises that the **world system is not static**.

Just like living organisms, every system goes through three temporal phases:

**origin, growth, and decay.**

A system emerges when new economic structures form,  
grows as its internal logic strengthens,  
and eventually weakens as contradictions accumulate — inequality, overproduction, resistance, political instability.

This dynamic nature explains why no world order is permanent. Even capitalism, the dominant system since the 17th century, has its internal tensions and breaking points.

### The Swan Song — The Darkest Hour of a System

Wallerstein uses a haunting metaphor: the **swan song**.

It represents the **worst time in system evolution** — the phase when a system is collapsing but has not yet been replaced.

In this turbulent period, instability grows, inequality deepens, crises multiply, and old institutions lose legitimacy.

Today's global turbulence — inequality, populism, climate crises, economic shocks — can be seen as part of capitalism's **swan song**, signalling a painful transition toward an uncertain new system.

## Critical Evaluation

### Economic Reductionism

Critics argue that while Wallerstein provides a powerful framework, he often commits **economic reductionism**.

He reduces complex political and social realities to economic forces alone.

This oversimplifies global politics by suggesting that markets and capital explain everything.

### Ignoring Military and New Ideas

Scholars also say Wallerstein **ignores the role of military power**.

Empires, superpowers, and great-power rivalry cannot be reduced to economic logic alone — coercion and force still matter.

Similarly, he underestimates **new ideas** — nationalism, feminism, human rights, identity politics, technological culture — all of which reshape global interactions in ways the market cannot fully explain.

### Why Wallerstein Still Matters

Even with its limitations, world systems theory remains one of the most influential explanations of global inequality.

It forces us to see the world as a structured whole — not random, not fair, but historically constructed.

## Gramscian School

### Robert Cox — Theory Is Never Neutral

The **Gramscian School** brings a fresh, profound insight into IR:

**“Theory is always for someone and for some**



**purpose.”**

This line from **Robert Cox**, in his influential article *Social Forces, States and World Orders*, warns us that no theory in international politics is innocent.

Every theory reflects the interests, values and worldview of some social force — whether elites, corporations, states or global institutions.

Cox argues that global politics is shaped not only by **economic power** and **military power**, as Marxists and realists often emphasise, but also by **ideological power** — the ability to shape what the world believes is normal, natural, or beneficial.

### **Gramsci — Coercion and Consent Together**

Inspired by **Antonio Gramsci**, this school highlights two pillars of global domination:

**coercion** and **manufacturing consent**.

Coercion is easy to recognise — armies, sanctions, invasions, threats.

But Gramsci’s brilliance lies in showing how domination also happens through **consent** — getting people to accept the values of the powerful as if they are universal truths.

This is how hegemony works:

people obey because they are convinced, not because they are forced.

### **Ideological Power in Action — The U.S. and Free Trade**

A clear example is how the **United States convinced the world that free trade is benefit for all**.

This belief shapes global thinking, institutions, trade rules and development models.

But Gramsci and Cox would say:

this is not universal truth — it is **ideological power at work**, benefiting those who already

dominate global markets.

Through media, academia, policy networks, and global institutions, powerful states **manufacture consent** for ideas that serve their interests.

### **Why the Gramscian Perspective Matters**

The Gramscian school tells us something essential:

To understand international politics, you must look beyond tanks and GDP.

You must analyse **ideas, norms, culture, education, media, and global narratives** — all the tools used to produce consent for an unequal world order.

It teaches us that global hegemony is not maintained only by force, but by shaping what people around the world *believe* is right, inevitable, or natural.

### **Critical School / Emancipation**

#### **The Frankfurt School — Challenging Power, Freeing People**

The **Critical School**, rooted in the **Frankfurt School**, enters IR with a dramatically different purpose from realism or liberalism.

While others ask, “*How do we manage the world?*” critical theorists ask, “*How do we transform the world?*”

Their goal is **emancipation** — freeing individuals and societies from structures of domination.

Critical scholars argue that the world order is built on inequalities, and theories that describe the world as “normal” often hide these injustices. So they challenge not just power structures, but the theories that justify them.



### **Territorial Boundaries Are Irrelevant**

Thinkers like **Andrew** (Andrew Linklater) take this further by arguing that in today's globalised world, **territorial boundaries are irrelevant**.

Global problems — climate change, pandemics, financial crises, migration, inequality — do not stop at borders.

So why should our moral and political imagination stop there?

Linklater pushes us to think beyond the nation-state toward a global community bound by responsibility and ethical concern.

### **Globalisation and the Threat to Democracy**

The Critical School warns that **globalisation may lead to reduced democracy instead of grassroots democracy**.

Instead of empowering ordinary people, globalisation often empowers:

MNCs,  
financial markets,  
bureaucratic institutions,  
and unelected global elites.

As power moves upward, away from citizens and toward corporations or supranational bodies, people lose control.

The promise of globalisation can turn into a **democratic deficit**, where decisions affecting billions are taken by a few.

### **Moral Boundaries and Critical Networks**

To counter this, the Frankfurt School insists on the need for **moral boundaries** — limits based not on territory, but on justice, ethics and universal human dignity.

They imagine a world where **networks of critical schools** continuously question and expose domination, hierarchy and exclusion.

These networks become global watchdogs

against abuse — pushing states, corporations and institutions to treat people not as subjects but as equal members of a shared moral community.

### **Why the Critical School Matters**

The Critical School gives IR a moral compass.

It asks us to:

question power,  
challenge structures of inequality,  
and imagine a world where emancipation — not domination — drives politics.

It is not about explaining the world; it is about **changing it**.

### **Systems Approach**

#### **A Scientific Ambition in IR**

The **systems approach** emerged during the behavioural revolution, when scholars wanted IR to be as scientific and predictive as physics. Thinkers like **Robert Kaplan** attempted to build a **grand theory at par with Newton's law** — something that could explain global behaviour with precision and reliability.

Their dream was big:

Can we understand world politics the same way scientists understand gravity?

Can we find patterns so strong that they predict how states will behave?

#### **Behavioural or Science Theory**

The systems approach falls under the **behavioural or science theory** tradition in IR.

It relies on empirical data, measurable variables, and formal models. Instead of looking at speeches or ideology, it looks at **inputs, processes, and outputs** of the international system.





Kaplan and others wanted IR to move away from moral arguments and philosophical speculation, and toward **micro analysis** — careful, data-based study of **past, present and future** events.

Their belief was simple but ambitious:

If we gather enough data,  
analyse patterns consistently,  
and compare global trends across time,  
we can **predict global outcomes**.

This approach tried to transform IR into a predictive science — almost like meteorology for world politics.

### ***The Promise of Systems Thinking***

By treating the world as a single interconnected system, scholars hoped to identify:  
recurring behavioural patterns,  
probabilities of war and peace,  
effects of polarity changes,  
and long-term trajectories of global power.

It was an attempt to move IR beyond intuition and into scientific forecasting.

### ***Ten Models of the Systems Approach***

#### **A Grand Attempt to Map the World System**

In his search for a predictive science of international politics, Robert Kaplan developed **ten models**.

Each model captures a different possible arrangement of global power, helping scholars understand how systems behave under certain structural conditions.

Think of these models as “maps of world orders,” each reflecting a distinct balance of power and pattern of interaction.

#### ***Balance of Power (BoP) Model***

This model involves **5–6 powerful states** with **no preponderant power**.

Power is distributed widely, and stability depends on constant balancing.

This resembles 19th-century Europe, where coalitions shifted frequently to prevent domination.

#### ***Bipolar Model***

Here, global power is **divided between two poles**.

This is the classic structure of the **Cold War**, where the U.S. and USSR dominated the system. Competition is intense but predictable.

#### ***Loose Bipolar Model***

A milder version of bipolarity.

Blocs exist, but **weak attraction** between members allows autonomy.

The **NAM (Non-Aligned Movement)** is the best example—states chose not to fully align with either superpower.

#### ***Very Loose Bipolar Model***

In this model, tensions exist **within** the blocs themselves.

Examples include:

China–Soviet bloc tensions,

France’s disagreements with NATO.

The poles are still there, but their alliances are unstable.

#### ***Détente Model***

Here, **tension is relaxed**.

Superpowers cooperate, reduce hostility and sign agreements like SALT or arms-control treaties.

The Cold War’s 1970s phase represents this model.



### Universal Actor Model

A hypothetical but important scenario:  
a **world government**.

One universal actor governs all states, eliminating anarchy.

This model rarely exists but helps theorists explore what global authority might look like.

### Hierarchical Model

This is the model of **one hegemon** — a **unipolar system**.

After the Cold War, with U.S. dominance, the world closely resembled this structure.

A single power sets rules, enforces norms and maintains order.

### Unit Veto Model

A chilling model where states have **equal capacity to destroy each other**.

Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) during the nuclear era fits here.

Security depends on the **fear of retaliation**.

### Incomplete Nuclear Diffusion Model

This model reflects a world with **14–15 nuclear states**, not complete proliferation but not narrow either.

More nuclear actors mean more complexity, more risk and less predictability.

### Unstable Block System

The most dangerous model.

Here, **high suspicion**, fragile alliances and intense competition make the system volatile.

Small miscalculations can spark major conflict.

### Why Kaplan's Models Matter

Kaplan tried to create a scientific framework for mapping world order.

While the world doesn't fit neatly into one model

forever, these models help students and policymakers recognise patterns, anticipate risks and understand how different structures influence global behaviour.

### Five Variables

Five Variables of the Systems Approach

### Mapping Power Through Measurable Factors

In the systems approach, scholars believed that if we identify the right variables and measure them precisely, we can understand how states behave and how the global system evolves. These **five variables** act like the building blocks of a scientific analysis of world politics.

### Physical Geography — Borders, Climate, Terrain

The first variable is **physical geography**.

A country's **borders, climate, and terrain** play a decisive role in shaping its security and strategy.

Mountain ranges protect (like the Himalayas).

Islands require naval power (like Japan or the UK).

Climate affects agriculture, population density and economic resilience.

Realists saw geography as destiny — and the systems approach scientifically incorporated it.

### Human Geography — Size, Distribution, Ethnic Composition

Human geography captures the **size and distribution** of population, and its **ethnic composition**.

A large, youthful population can be an economic strength.

A divided or highly diverse ethnic landscape



may create internal tensions.

Whether people live in cities or rural areas changes how a state mobilises resources, votes, and wages war.

### **Logistical Capacity — Moving People, Goods and Information**

Logistical capacity is the ability to move **people, goods and information** efficiently.

This includes:

transport networks,  
ports,  
railways,  
digital infrastructure,  
communication systems.

A state with robust logistics has strategic mobility, economic advantage and administrative power.

In modern warfare and trade, logistics often decide victory more than raw capability.

### **Economic Capacity — The Foundation of Development**

Economic capacity determines how much wealth a state can produce and how effectively it can develop.

It includes GDP, industrial base, technology, innovation, and global trade participation.

A strong economy strengthens diplomacy, military power and resilience.

A weak economy restricts choices.

### **Military Capacity — The Guardian of Security**

Finally, **military capacity** determines a state's ability to protect its interests.

This includes:

troop strength,  
weapons systems,  
defence technology,

training,  
intelligence networks,  
and strategic reach.

States with superior military capacity enjoy deterrence, influence and bargaining power. Those without it rely on alliances.

### **Why These Five Variables Matter**

Together, these variables help scholars treat world politics like a system — one that can be analysed through observable data.

They show that power isn't abstract; it is grounded in geography, population, logistics, economy and military strength.

Kaplan believed that by studying these variables, we could predict global behaviour with near-scientific accuracy.

### **Critics**

Critics of the Systems Approach

### **A Misstep in the Right Direction — Stanley Hoffman**

The systems approach was ambitious — it tried to give IR the precision of natural sciences. But **Stanley Hoffman** famously called it “**a misstep in a right direction.**”

Why?

Because while it used scientific tools and mathematical rigour, it **failed to define** the very basics of a system —

its **character**,  
its **boundary**,  
its **environment**,  
and its **process**.

In other words, the theory looked scientific, but its foundations were blurry. It wanted to be Newton's physics, but it lacked Newton's clarity.



### **Liberal Critique — Missing History, Ideology and Complexity**

Liberals argued that the systems approach treated world politics as if states were robots responding to variables.

But real states are shaped by **history, ideology, national identity, and domestic politics** — variables the systems approach did **not discuss**.

Liberals also said the approach **oversimplified complex interdependence**.

By reducing relationships to inputs and outputs, it missed the depth of global interconnectedness — trade networks, environmental ties, technology flows, non-state actors, communication webs, and transnational movements.

The world was far more complex than the system models suggested.

### **Karl Deutsch — Missing the Multipolar World**

Communication theorist **Karl Deutsch** added another powerful critique.

He argued that the systems approach was **missing the multipolar world**.

Its models worked well for bipolar or hierarchical systems, but not for real-world situations where **multiple centres of power interact simultaneously**.

Deutsch pointed out that the modern world is fluid, pluralistic and decentralised — a reality the systems approach simply couldn't capture.

### **Why These Critiques Matter**

Together, these critiques show why the systems approach eventually faded:

it was too abstract,  
too mechanical,  
too rigid,

and too removed from the complexity of human behaviour, identity, history and politics.

But Hoffman was right — despite its flaws, it was still a **step in the right direction** because it pushed IR toward better methods, better clarity and more scientific thinking.

### **Games Theory**

#### **Scientific Prediction — Turning IR into Mathematics**

**Games theory** brings a scientific, almost mathematical lens to international relations.

It applies **scientific methods** to predict how states will behave in conflict, cooperation or crisis.

Just like realists, it assumes the **state is a rational player** — calculating costs, benefits and risks to maximise its interests.

Instead of emotional decisions, it studies strategic choices based on logic and probability.

#### **Game of Strategy — Playing to Win**

At its core, games theory analyses **games of strategy**.

These are situations where each player's move depends on what they think the other player will do.

The goal is **winning**, and outcomes often resemble a **zero-sum game** — one state's gain is another's loss.

Whether it's war, trade negotiation, arms race or diplomacy, games theory asks:

*What is the smartest move when the opponent is also smart?*



### **The Chickens Game — Cuban Missile Crisis 1962**

One of the most dramatic illustrations is the **Chickens Game**, used to explain the **Cuban Missile Crisis 1962**.

Imagine two cars speeding toward each other in a head-on collision.

The first to swerve is labelled “**chicken-hearted**” — a loser.

But if neither swerves, both die.

This creates a dilemma:

**prestige vs protection from catastrophe.**

In the Cuban missile crisis, the U.S. and USSR raced toward confrontation.

Backing down meant loss of prestige;

not backing down meant nuclear war.

Eventually, Kennedy and Khrushchev made calculated moves to avoid disaster — one of the most iconic examples of strategic behaviour in IR.

### **Prisoner's Dilemma — Why Cooperation Fails**

The **Prisoners Dilemma** explains why states often **do not cooperate** even when cooperation clearly benefits both sides.

Two players cannot trust each other, so they choose strategies that protect themselves — even if it leads to a worse outcome.

A perfect real-world example is the **India–Pakistan nuclear rivalry**.

Both countries know that cooperation, restraint and assurance would bring stability.

Yet both **acquire nuclear weapons** and keep building arsenals.

Because each fears that if they cooperate while the other defects, they will become vulnerable.

Thus cooperation remains beneficial **in theory**, but **not practical** due to mistrust, fear and

insecurity.

### **Why Games Theory Matters**

Games theory helps us understand high-stakes decisions:

Why states bluff.

Why they escalate.

Why they hesitate.

Why they avoid cooperation even when it's in their best interest.

It turns international politics into a strategic mind-game — one where rationality, fear, pride and survival all collide.

### **Post-Colonial Approach**

#### **Voice of the Subaltern — Restoring the Silenced Majority**

The **post-colonial approach** enters International Politics with a mission:

to make IP **egalitarian** by bringing forward the **voice of the subaltern** — the forgotten, the colonised, the marginalised.

Where mainstream IR theories speak from the perspective of great powers, post-colonial scholars ask:

*What about the billions who lived under colonialism?*

*What about those who still suffer its effects?*

They insist that international politics cannot be understood without listening to the people who were historically silenced.

#### **Critique of Western Dominance — Breaking the Monopoly of Knowledge**

Post-colonial thinkers argue that IR is dominated by Western worldviews, narratives and priorities.

They cite the powerful critique by **Stanley Hoffman**, who declared that International



Politics is an **American Social Science** — built around American assumptions, American interests, and American historical experiences.

Even **Hans Morgenthau**, the father of realism, revealed this bias when he referred to the **political emptiness of Africa**, dismissing centuries of African civilisation, statecraft and cultural systems.

Post-colonial scholars expose such statements as examples of **Western arrogance**, where history outside Europe is treated as irrelevant or inferior.

### ***Hierarchy, Not Anarchy — The Real Structure of World Politics***

While realism argues the international system is **anarchical**, post-colonial scholars firmly disagree. They argue that the true global structure is **hierarchical**, not anarchic.

This hierarchy is **designed to exploit**, not accidentally produced.

Through:

colonial legacies,

unequal trade,

IMF/World Bank conditionalities,

selective humanitarianism,

and **wilful neglect** of developing countries,

the global order continues to privilege the West and marginalise the Global South.

This is why post-colonial thinkers reject realist descriptions of “equal sovereign states.”

They insist that IR is built on centuries of domination, resource extraction and racial-civilisational hierarchies.

### ***Why the Post-Colonial Lens Matters***

This approach forces IR to finally confront uncomfortable truths:

that colonialism shaped borders, conflicts, economies and identities;

that the Global South’s concerns are not peripheral but central;

that Western theories cannot explain a world built on **colonial violence** and **post-colonial dependency**.

It demands a discipline where power is questioned, history is acknowledged, and the subaltern finally speaks.

### ***Previous Year Questions***

1. Explain the central tenets of the World-Systems Theory. 2024, 10
2. "The Gramscian theory of hegemony provides many valuable insights into the nature of global power." Comment. 2024, 20
3. Discuss the commonalities between the Marxist and Realist approach to the study of International Politics. 2022, 10
4. "The post-colonial state was thought of an entity that stood outside and above society as an autonomous agency." Explain. 2021, 20
5. "Marxist approach to the study of international relations has lost its relevance in the post-cold war era." Comment. 2021, 10
6. Explain the relevance of the Marxist approach in the context of globalization. 2019, 20
7. Examine the World Systems Approach as developed by Immanuel Wallerstein. 2017, 15
8. Critically examine the functional and system approaches to the study of international relations. 2016, 10
9. "Morton A. Kaplan's system theory is contrary to the fundamental precepts of systems approach." Comment. 2014, 15
10. How does Marxist approach explain contemporary International Relations? 2013,



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11. Do you agree with the notion that Marxist approach to the study of International relations is largely based on economic reductionism? Give reasons. 2008, 60
12. Comment on: Game Theory for the study of International Politics and its limitations. 2005, 20
13. Comment on: Marxist approach to international politics. 2002, 20

