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International Relations: Theorising Revolutions in Realism

Hofman, Michiel

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THEORISING REVOLUTIONS IN REALISM

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Supervisor: Professor André W.M. Gerrits

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Michiel Max Hofman

Abstract

'In this paper, I explore the relationship between realist theory and the phenomenon of revolution. Realism, being one of the key IR theories and considering the inherently conflictual nature of revolutions, has surprising little to say on this topic specifically. My aim thus is to elucidate how revolutions can be understood through existing realist theory. I do this through an analysis of the key texts and authors of Classical Realism and Structural Realism, highlighting the aspects of the thought which is applicable. I wish to demonstrate that realism is a strong theoretical tool for understanding these events, and I parse out four key attributes through which to do so. Revolutions' Amplification of material power, Challenge to the Status Quo, their Amour-Propre and their Break in Communication with other states. In all, I provide a review of Revolution and Realism thus far, identify its key theoretical tools and suggest a framework for further research'.

Contents

Introduction

Revolutions are one of the great engines of change in history. Their impact is felt far beyond their geographical and temporal borders. If any theory of International Relations pretends to be comprehensive, it must account for these transformative events. Realism, with its focus on conflict and war, ought to be well placed to do so, but somehow it is not. This paper is aimed at exploring how revolutions can be understood through existing realist theory. I undertake this study because I have found that Revolution, as a theoretical category, has been relatively overlooked in realist theory, since it is usually considered as a strictly domestic variable of states. By 'Revolution', I mean a total and comprehensive overhaul of both society and the state, leading to permanent changes in state legitimacy, ideology, and societal organisation. This study takes a relatively simple methodology; I analyse some of the key authors and texts of both Classical and Structural Realism and identify in which ways Revolution can be understood through them. My primary sources for this study are the seminal texts of those respective theoretical schools, with the aid of secondary texts directly or indirectly covering the subjects of Revolution itself. Through the study of those text, I identify four key attributes through which Revolution can be theorised in Realism: Amplification of material power, Challenge to the Status Quo, the Amour-Propre of states and Breakdown in Communication.

Realism, of course, is only one fish in the diverse and ever-growing school of International Relations (IR). To approach this topic, it is necessary to explore two prerequisites: the state of academy on revolutions in IR generally and the state of Realism itself. The first chapter will be dedicated to these questions. I hope to elucidate for the reader three main findings. First that revolutions, although they had a brief moment in the sun during the 1990s, are relatively undervalued in the study of IR. Second, that this undervaluation is most acute in the field of Realism. Thirdly and finally, that this need not necessarily be the case and that there is an argument for the importance of revolutions within the axiomatic framework of Realism, which will be the object of the remainder of this paper.

Before commencing, I want to make a brief note on how the concept of 'Revolution' has been defined in the context of IR and thus how I will understand it for the remainder of this paper. In most of the literature on this topic, Revolutions are defined along the

lines of the 'Social Revolutions' that Theda Skocpol outlined in her seminal *States and Social Revolutions*:

> 'Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below'[1].

However, usually the class-based element is omitted in order to include socially revolutionary regimes which did not come about due to popular action, such as Meiji Japan or Nazi Germany[2]. Some authors, like Peter Calvert, have taken a much broader conception, including all 'seizures of power and depositions of rulers' as revolutions[3]. But usually, political regime change with little social consequence is considered a coup d'état, and I will be considering them as such as well. The definition which I will be following most exactly comes from Stephen Walt:

> '[The] destruction of an existing state by members of its own society, followed by the creation of a new political order.'[4]

I believe this definition to be the most precise and useful when discussing revolution in the context of IR.

[1] Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China,* (Cambridge 1979), 4

[2] Michael Mann, 'Communism, fascism and counter revolution in world politics', *Review of International Studies*, 27:4 (2002), 683–6, 684–5, On the revolutionary nature of Nazi Germany, applicable to Meiji Japan and other similar cases

[3] Peter Calvert, *Revolution and International Politics,* 2nd Ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 2

[4] Stephen Walt, *Revolution and War,* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1996), 12

1. Literature Review

Realism was the first theoretical lens through which International Relations as a distinct discipline began to be studied. The basic logic of Realism is to try to understand the nature of International Relations as it is, rather than as it ought to be. As such, its intellectual roots are in such classical political treatises as *The history of the Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides, *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli and *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes. Although none of these authors would have called themselves 'realists' nor would they have had a conception of International Relations as we discuss it today, by tracing its lineage to these classic texts, Realism claims to articulate this extended intellectual tradition[5].

Today, Realism is generally understood, not necessarily as a distinct school of thought, but rather as a 'philosophical disposition'[6], in line with its supposed intellectual pedigree. However, it is fair to say that Realism as it is commonly understood today, was consolidated in the mid-twentieth century, beginning with E.H Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* in 1939 before being confirmed by Hans Morgenthau's seminal *Politics Among Nations* in 1948[7]. This body of work was added to by other essential authors throughout the twentieth century such as Raymond Aron, Reinhold Niebuhr and Henry Kissinger to name a few. This body is now usually termed as 'Classical Realism'. It is so named, because in 1979, Kenneth Waltz published his *Theory of International Politics,* which followed the intellectual bellwether of the times by attempting to articulate a positivistic and behaviouralist approach to International Relations, as opposed to the more historically and normatively minded 'classical' realists. This approach, usually called 'Structural Realism' or 'Neorealism' remains the dominant force in the field of realism today[8]. Classical Realism, though still widely read and respected, is not considered by most to be a contemporary approach[9].

That being said, all forms of Realism share some commonalities, as they are all sprung from the same intellectual stock. Firstly, and perhaps most essentially, there is

[5] Colin Elman and Michael A. Jensen, Eds., *Realism Reader,* (London: Routledge 2014), 3
[6] Robert Gilpin, 'The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism', *International Organization,* 38:2 (Spring 1984), 289 and Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, (Cambridge 2004), 6. Both authors cited here use this exact language, but a similar sentiment is echoed across other works on realism.
[7] Matthew Specter, *The Atlantic Realists,* (Stanford 2022), 1
[8] Jonathan Kirshner, *An Unwritten Future,* (Princeton 2022), 1
[9] Elman and Jensen, *Realism Reader,* 4

the assumption of international anarchy. Secondly, the focus is on the state (or more precisely, groupings of politically organised persons considered as a unit, whatever the appellation thereof) as the primary unit of analysis. Thirdly, there is the assertion that survival or fear are the primary motivations of states[10], though this is more pertinent to neorealism as I shall elaborate later in this paper. This is the bedrock whence all Realist theories originate, of which there are a multitude. I noted already the main schism in Realist thought, which passes teleologically from Classical Realism to Neorealism, however there are numerous sub-schools. Falling generally under the moniker of Classical Realism are Balance of Power Theory and Rise and Fall theory. Falling generally under the Neorealist moniker are Offensive Realism and Defensive Realism. Neoclassical Realism also exists as a sub-branch, attempting to redress perceived flaws in Neorealism's relegation of all domestic factors in International Relations[11]. A more expansive study could take the time to address every nuance and sub-nuance of every branch of Realism here relayed, for my purposes however I will be focussing in broad strokes on Classical Realism and Neorealism in terms of how they discuss Revolution.

Realism remains one of the most important schools of International Relations. The Neorealist branch especially has some of the most well-known scholars working on IR today, such as Mearsheimer in Chicago and Walt at Harvard. However, its heyday of total dominance in the intellectual scene of IR during the mid and late twentieth century has certainly passed. Competing theories such as Liberalism, Constructivism and the 'English School' for example, are just as well if not better represented in the cannon of International Relations today[12]. This is even more true for the study of revolutions in IR, the object of this paper. As I am about to demonstrate, the vast majority of the scholarship on the place of revolutions in International Relations comes from Liberalism and the English School. This, in a sense, was one of the impetuses of this study. Realism, as Donnelly puts it, offers invaluable insights into recurrent patterns and sources of conflict, competition, and diffidence[13]. These are all factors inherent of and essential to revolutionary phenomena. Thus, its lack of study within Realism (and particularly Classical Realism) is puzzling to me. My object in this paper is to go back to the roots, so to speak, of Realism to demonstrate that there is ample theoretical explanatory power in

[10] Gilpin, 'The Richness of Realism', 290-301
[11] Elman and Jensen, *Realism Reader,* this edited collection is a fantastic resource on all these branches and more.
[12] Jeff Colgan, 'Where Is International Relations Going? Evidence from Graduate Training', *International Studies Quarterly,* 60:3 (September 2016), 493
[13] Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations,* 197

those key texts to understand revolutions from a Realist perspective. Before I launch into the meat of this analysis though, I will contextualise the field of IR as it relates to revolutions today.

1.1. International Relations and Revolution

If there is any consensus in the International Relations literature on revolutions, it is that there is not enough literature and no consensus. To present just a smattering of scholars' musings on the subject: 'In much of IR literature, revolutions have a marginal presence' (Halliday) [14] , 'Despite its obvious importance, however, the subject of revolutionary foreign policy is underexplored.' (Walt)[15], 'Revolutions as an international theme has been underrepresented'(Visentini)[16]. Almost every book and article written about International Relations and revolutions contains some words to this effect. Does this assessment still apply?

It was certainly true in 1990. Lacunae were rigorously addressed in a flurry of major works that came out during that decade. Since then, however, whilst there remains a steady trickle of articles addressing the question to greater and lesser degrees, no new major works have been published. The major books published on this topic are as follows: Kyung-Won Kim's *Revolution and the International System* (1970), Peter Calvert's *Revolution and International Politics* (1984 (2nd Ed. 2016)), David Armstrong's *Revolution and World Order* (1993), Stephen Walt's *Revolution and War* (1996) and finally Fred Halliday's *Revolution and World Politics* (1999). Whether or not the lack of new major works since this time is due to all viable *Revolution and X* titles having been used up is beyond this scope of this paper, though I would suggest to any aspiring authors that *Revolution and International Relations* is still up for grabs[17].

I will make a brief review of the main arguments of each book and their theoretical precepts to establish better the field, organised by theme. First, I will look at the books of Calvert, Armstrong and Halliday, who write about Revolutions and International relations from the perspective of the English School.

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[14] Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics,* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press 1999), 293
[15] Stephen Walt, 'Revolution and War', *World Politics,* 44:3 (April 1992), 322
[16] Paulo Visentini, 'Revolution and International Relations: The African Case', *Brazilian Journal of African Studies,* 1:1 (January 2016), 107
[17] It may seem simplistic to say that the major works which treat IR and Revolution are all explicitly titled as such, however through an analysis of the more recent articles on this topic, such as Visentini's or Lawson's, these are the only books which are still consistently cited.

1.2. The English School Approach

The English school of International Relations has been described as 'occupying the middle ground in IR alongside constructivism',[18]between Realism on one end and Idealism on the other. It takes as its organising principle the idea of 'International Society' which is distinct from the International System of Realism. This is best described by the leading author of the school, Hedley Bull:

> '[international society exists when] …a group of states (or, more generally, a group of independent political communities) which not merely form a system, in the sense that the behaviour of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others, but also have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognise their common interest in maintaining these arrangements'[19].

This concept of 'International Society' has proved to be a fruitful theoretical field from which to harvest ideas on revolutions in IR and indeed authors of the English School have been the most prolific of all authors on this topic. Aside from the major publications that I have mentioned and which I will treat in turn, there are some contributions from other English School authors which are worth mentioning. Barry Buzan and George Lawson in *The Global Transformation* touch on Revolution in its ideational aspect of 'progress'[20] in the context of the transformative 19th century, which is the subject of their book. They note that revolutions are a threat to the International Order by their invocation of 'universality',[21] which threatens all states in the International Society. Nick Bisley has written not on Revolution per se but Counter-Revolution, which is in itself inextricably constituent to Revolution. He posits, as do other English School authors, that revolution is an inherently international event and thus counter-revolution forms part of the political process of international social conflict[22]. His position thus is that counter-revolution is a challenge to the 'principle' of revolution, not to its material power[23]. Interestingly, he makes some comparisons of this idea to traditionally realist scholars,

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[18] Tim Dunne, 'The English School' in Tim Dunne Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, Eds., *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity,* 3rd Ed. (Oxford 2013), 134
[19] Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, Eds., *The Expansion of International Society,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984), 1
[20] Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation,* (Cambridge 2015), 140
[21] Ibid 146
[22] Nick Bisley, 'Counter-Revolution and International Politics', *Review of International Studies,* 30 (2004), 54
[23] Ibid, 65

Kissinger and Aron, both of whom write on the legitimating principles of the International System[24].

Though I would like to delve into the specificities of every person who has dared write the words 'Revolution' and 'International Relations' in close proximity, I am constrained here for good or for ill by space. So, I will move onto the major publications.

Calvert takes a much wider definition of revolution than the other authors discussed in this paper. As such, his book is concerned for a large part with insurgencies and smaller scale political upheaval. Though he explicitly subscribes to the English School, 'The international community" is, therefore, in the words of Hedley Bull (1977), an 'anarchical society"[25], he does not necessarily analyse revolutions in reference to this., Calvert's work is comparitively more granular and concerned with the practical procedure of revolutions and coups, rather than attempting to develop a systematic theory of revolutions. He presents a number of insights backed with anecdotal evidence based on his analysis, for example 'international aid and assistance is the most important factor determining the outcome of an insurgency.'[26]. Though it is an important precursor in the study of Revolutions and International Relations, it is not as pertinent to the question of theory, which is my object, so I will leave Calvert there.

David Armstrong's *Revolution and World Order* is the first systematic attempt to understand Revolutions from an International Society approach. His basic argument is that revolutionary states have a reciprocal socialising effect on the international society, changing it but also being changed themselves[27]. Indeed, he defines revolutions in terms of their relationship with the international society:

> '[A revolutionary state is a state whose] relations with other states are revolutionary, because it stands in some sense for fundamental change in the principals on the basis of which states conduct their relations with each other'[28].

Another important argument he makes is that revolutionary states cause a breakdown in communication at the international level, causing misperceptions of intent

[24] Ibid, 57-63
[25] Peter Calvert, *Revolution and International Politics,* 25
[26] Ibid, 159
[27] David Armstrong, *Revolution and World Order,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993), 2
[28] Ibid 3

between states,[29] which is an argument that will be echoed across much of the literature, and is equally relevant to realist interpretations.

Armstrong's work here has been important in this study, it is cited in almost every book that came after it and continues to be cited today. However, as Armstrong admits himself his study 'is not tightly organized around a systematic set of theoretical propositions'[30]. Thus, in terms of a full theoretical treatment it is a foundation to be built on, but nonetheless it touches on most of the important points and ideas that continue to define the English Schools' (and others) thoughts on revolution and IR today.

Fred Halliday's 1999 study is perhaps the most comprehensive and most well remembered work that specifically addresses the role of social revolutions in IR. His interest in this topic was first publicised in an article in 1999, which over the following decade he developed into his book. In both that original article and the book, he invokes the language of Marx who calls revolutions the 'sixth great power'.[31] (For Marx this is in reference to the pentarchic system of great powers during the nineteenth century, France, Britain, Germany, Austria and Russia). For Halliday, revolutions are not only always an international affair, but he argues they have been a massive component in the structure of the modern international system[32]. Halliday's treatment is broad and comprehensive, covering systems, war, counter-revolution, foreign policy, history and more, but this paper is not a review of his book nor a review of the English School so I will only touch on his treatment of theory. He dedicates a chapter to this notion, covering nearly all the authors that I have mentioned here. His own position is more closely aligned to Armstrong and is best resumed thusly:

> 'The transnational dimension [of revolutions] is also central to shaping the reasons for the choices revolutionary states make, and the responses, of support and opposition, they occasion in others. It is these considerations - the linkage between international processes and domestic change, and the resulting consequences of domestic change for international relations - that form the context in which revolutions affect the international system.'[33]

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[29] Ibid, 6
[30] Ibid, 3, 11
[31] Fred Halliday, '" The Sixth Great Power" On the study of revolution and International Relations', *Review of International Studies,* 16 (1990)
[32] Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics*, 11
[33] Ibid, 311

This approach has later been termed as 'inter-social' in a subsequent review of this book, and I agree that is the best descriptor. Effectively, for Halliday, revolutions form part of a complex network of ideas, force, ideology and legitimacy that bind states together, and posits that events in one country are affected by and have effects on other counties.[34] In many ways, Halliday's conclusions are what they say on the tin, Revolutions are a 'sixth' great power.

There is more literature than this on revolutions in the English School. These theoretical labels are more general than they are precise, and each individual author has their own approach but I have covered the major publications. With a greater focus on ideas, and deploying the concept of the 'international society', the English School has provided so far the most expansive explanations of revolutions in IR. As I move on now to the slightly less auspicious contributions from realists, I want to note there can of course be some cross-theoretical pollination. Whilst realists might not subscribe to the idea of an International Society, normative order in the International System plays a big part in Classical Realist theories. The disruptive nature of revolutions to that order and the two-way socialising effect should be taken seriously in Realist considerations of revolution.

1.3. Realist Approaches so far

The contributions of realists in the field, as compared to the English School, are comparatively little, but not insignificant. The aforementioned authors of the English School are well aware of this and are not afraid to say that 'Realism denies that revolutions make much difference to the conduct of foreign policy'[35]. The sentiment that Halliday references here is primarily that of the strict Neorealists, like Kenneth Waltz, and that is indeed their approach. This is the most that Waltz has to say on the impact of revolution on foreign policy:

> 'The pressures of competition were rapidly felt and reflected in the Soviet Union's diplomacy. Thus Lenin, sending foreign minister Chicherin to the Genoa Conference of 1922, bade him farewell with this caution: "Avoid big words" (quoted in Moore 1950, p. 204). Chicherin, who personified the carefully tailored traditional diplomat rather than the simply uniformed revolutionary, was to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric for the sake of working deals'[36]

[34] George Lawson, 'Halliday's revenge: revolutions and international relations.' *International affairs*, 87:5 (2011), 10-11
[35] Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics,* 293
[36] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* (Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley 1979), 128

So, in effect, he says that even revolutionaries cannot duck the system. Georgy Chicherin will dutifully don a top-hat and play the political game the same as everyone else, as the pressures of the international system leave them no other choice. Representing this as the final word of realism however is myopic and demonstrates the overwhelming dominance of neorealism today, such that it is considered the default approach. There are however significantly different perspectives, not only from Classical Realists but from other Neorealists too.

Before reviewing the two principal books from this perspective, from Walt and Kim, I want to touch briefly on Kissinger. Kissinger never wrote specifically on revolutions in IR, however his writing on diplomacy is relevant to the topic insofar as he makes a distinction between 'revolutionary' and 'legitimate' international orders. Kissinger calls the international order revolutionary 'wherever there exists a power which consider the order or the manner of legitimising oppressive'[37]. When he says 'revolutionary order', this does not necessarily refer to an order in which states are revolutionary in the way in which I have defined it, but nevertheless the idea that a layer of normative legitimacy sits atop the International System and influences its constituents is an important precept for understanding the impact of revolution in realism. Aron makes a similar distinction between heterogenous and homogenous systems, this will be covered in chapter 3.

Kyung-Won Kim deserves credit for addressing revolution in IR much earlier than anyone else. Being published in 1970, *Revolution and International System* comes more than a decade before the next major publication from Calvert in 1984. However, by virtue of being so early, it is also rather underdeveloped compared to the most recent literature. That being said, it is still a valuable contribution. He follows Aron's conception of homogeneity in the International System and argues that a heterogeneous element in the form of a revolutionary state creates barriers of miscommunication and misunderstanding of intent:

> 'What a difference in ideology does is to put an additional strain on given international system by sharply increasing the chances of international misunderstanding'[38].

Since this concept is substantially expanded upon in Walt's book, I will leave Kim here, but as one of the first publication in this sub-sub-field, I thought it worth noting.

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[37] Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored,* (Friedland Books 2017), 2
[38] Kyung-Won Kim, *Revolution and International System,* (New York 1970), 123

Stephen Walt's book on revolutions is by far the most comprehensive realist approach published to date. Like Halliday, Walt had been interested in this idea for a while, first publishing his ideas in an article of the same name in 1992 before the full book in 1996. Walt theorises revolution through 'Balance of Threat Theory', of which he is the progenitor and banner holder. Principally, Walt's argument is that, counter to neorealist orthodoxy, revolutions have foreign policy implications by increasing the likelihood of war. Since Neorealism, and by extension Walt, is covered in my second chapter, I will make my explanation here brief.

Walt argues that neorealism needs to make some concession to unit level factors to understand revolutions[39]. The core of Walt's analysis, similar to Kim, is the understanding of intent between states. Walt however deploys this basic idea more systematically. Rather than a balance of power, Walt argues International Relations operates on a Balance of Threat. A revolutionary state increases the overall perception threat in the system, leading to the greater likelihood of war[40]. For example, a revolutionary state's abilities are changed, leading to windows of opportunity to attack. Revolutionary states' priorities change, leading to new areas of conflict. And a breakdown in communication between the revolutionary state and other states in the system causes new perceptions of threat between them, leading to perceptions of relative advantage/disadvantage. All these factors Walt argues increases the likelihood of war[41].

1.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I hope to have given a broad overview of state of academia in regards to Realism and revolutions in IR. Though the English School has many valuable lessons for the scholar of revolutions in IR, indeed it is the most thorough approach of any theory, I won't be substantially addressing their arguments again in this paper. My object is the study of revolutions in Realism. However, as I have addressed, there is potential for an exchange of ideas between the two theoretical groupings.

It is a shame that Realism, the approach whose greatest strength lies in the assessment war and conflict, is so underutilised in this field. Revolutions are inherently violent and conflictual affairs, not just within but without. Some meta-analyses of war

[39] Walt, *Revolution and War,* 5
[40] Walt, 'Revolution and War', 333
[41] Walt, *Revolution and War,* 44

have shown that states which undergo revolutionary regime change are twice as like to go to war than those who undergo gradual 'evolutionary' regime change[42]. Whilst Walt's *Revolution and War* is a wonderful start, which saves Realism from having nothing to say at all on the topic, I believe there is much richer vein to be mined. Using arguments on the material consequences of revolutions for states borrowed from scholars like Theda Skocpol, I believe revolutions have place even in the strictest Structural Realist theories such as that of Waltz or Mearsheimer. However, the true underexploited resource lies in Classical Realism. Classical Realism has been side-lined since the 1980's, though it is seeing some resurgence today. This applies especially to the subject at hand of Revolution. I hinted already at some of the analytic tools that can be deployed here from Kissinger, but in chapter three I present an in-depth analysis of the principal works of Raymond Aron, Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr. However, I will begin with the popular school of realism today: the Structural Realists.

[42] Zeev Maoz, 'Joining the Club of Nations: Political Development and International Conflict, 1816-1976', *International Studies Quarterly,* 33:2 (1989), 3-6

2. Structural Realism: Amplification of Material Power and Breakdown in Communication

The centralized State power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature organs wrought after the plan of a systematic and hierarchic division of labour-originates from the days of absolute monarchy ... Still, its development remained clogged by all manner of mediaeval rubbish, seignorial rights, local privileges, municipal and guild monopolies and provincial constitutions. The gigantic broom of the French Revolution .... swept away all of these relics of bygone times, thus tearing simultaneously the social soil of its last hindrances to the superstructure of the modern State edifice raised under the First Empire, itself the off spring of the coalition wars of old semi-feudal Europe against modern France.

Karl Marx[43]

Structural Realism, also known as Neo-Realism, is perhaps the most dogmatic or purist branch of realist theory. As the name would imply, this branch emphasises the supremacy of the structure or the system of states above all else. The logic therein being that on the international level, the same basic incentive structure is applicable equally to all states (or units in the jargon)[44] thus the domestic particularities (or unit-level variables) of any state are ultimately irrelevant to states' behaviour on the international level. Thus, unlike in Classical Realism, the manner in which states interact is essentially governed by exogenous factors and pressures and the internal attributes of any state within the system are irrelevant to its interactions with other units[45].

Of course, within Structural Realism itself, there are subdivisions, the main two being 'Offensive Realism' and 'Defensive Realism'. These theories are represented principally by John Mearsheimer then Stephen Walt and Kenneth Waltz respectively. The division between these two branches is titular. The Offensive Realism of Mearsheimer argues principally that states will seek to maximise their power at all times, viewing regional or global hegemony as the best means by which to guarantee their security in the long term. On the other side, Defensive Realism of Waltz and Walt argues that states will rather avoid aggressive behaviour as much as possible, preferring to

[43] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 289
[44] Richard Ned Lebow, 'Classical Realism', in *International Relations Theories,* 67
[45] Waltz, *Theory of international politics*, 72

maintain a balance of power between themselves. The main thread of similarity between these branches is that both assume the primacy of 'Great Powers' as the engines of IR, with all smaller states falling somewhere in their spheres of influence.

As articulated in the first chapter of this paper, the phenomenon of revolution is generally disregarded in Neo-Realism, save for in the writings of Walt. As noted previously, Waltz believes revolutionary states cannot overcome the exogenous pressures of the international system itself. Mearsheimer, where he mentions revolutions, believes similarly: 'Russian thinking about foreign policy before and after the Bolshevik Revolution was motivated largely by realist logic'[46]. In this chapter, I will make an argument for how revolutions can act as a system-level variable, thus making them relevant to the Neorealist thought of Mearsheimer and Waltz. This argument is based on the expanded material military capacities that revolutionary states experience. Finally, I will expand on an explanation of Walt's thought on revolutions. Though I have covered it in short in my literature review, it is helpful for his thought to be placed in the context of the wider Neorealist discourse.

2.1. Offensive Realism, Defensive Realism and Expanded Material Capabilities

Mearsheimer and Waltz are the two main proponents of Offensive and Defensive Realism respectively. In both theories however, two essential notions are shared: That Power is a function of the tangible assets of the state[47] and that the international system of states (that of anarchy between them) explains the common pressures that all states must abide by, regardless of individual attributes. As such, revolution under these models is usually considered as a unit-level attribute with little relevance for the international system[48].

However, outside the field of IR, strong arguments have been made, for not only the ideological power of revolutions, but also the new *material* power they confer. Theda Skocpol has been a leading scholar on this. From her empirical work on the revolutions in France, Russia and Iran, she found that revolutions 'have given birth to nations whose power and autonomy, markedly surpassed their own pre-revolutionary pasts and

[46] John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,* (New York: Norton 2001), 190
[47] John Mearsheimer, 'Structural Realism' in Dunne Ed. *International Relations Theory,* 78
[48] Mlada Bukovansky, 'The altered state and the state of nature—the French Revolution and international politics.', *Review of International Studies*, 25:2 (1999), 202

outstripped other countries in similar circumstances'[49]. She has also found that not only are states' access to material power increased, but equally so are their access to manpower: 'social revolutionary regimes have excelled at channelling enhanced popular participation into protracted warfare' [50]. This effect has also been termed as 'infrastructural power', or the state's ability to penetrate society[51]. It can thus be theorised that revolutions, in the sense that they have material consequences, are both unit-level and systems-level phenomena, by forcing those new power mediations on other states in the system in order to compete. It has even been suggested that this effect can work in reverse. That is to say that, the international system stimulates a revolution in states who are lagging in the security contest[52].

The essence of this idea is not new and was first properly articulated by Marx, as in the quote heading this chapter. Next, I will examine Defensive and Offensive Realism in turn.

2.2 Waltz and Defensive Realism

Kenneth Waltz is perhaps the quintessential Structural Realist. He and his version of Defensive Realism is also perhaps the most hostile to the inclusion of revolutions as a impactful factor in IR. This can be seen even in the language that he deploys to describe international relations. He eschews words like 'state' and 'international order', preferring to couch his theory in terms like political 'units' and the 'system' in which they interact. This distils what are usually considered to be the complex interactions and nuances that make up a state into unitary blocks. As he puts it, 'one cannot predict outcomes [in the system] based on attributes [of the units]' [53]. Like Mearsheimer, he is principally concerned with great powers within the system:

> 'A general theory of international politics…once written also applies to lesser states that interact, insofar as their interactions are insulated from the intervention of great powers in system'[54].

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[49] Theda Scokpol, *States and Social Revolutions,* 3
[50] Theda Skocpol, 'Social Revolutions and Mass Mobilisation', *World Politics* 40:2 (January 1988), 168
[51] Jeff Goodwin, 'State-Centered Approaches to Revolution' in John Forn Ed. *Theorizing Revolutions,* (London: Routledge 1997), 13
[52] Alexander Anievas, 'Revolutions and international relations: Rediscovering the classical bourgeois revolutions.' *European Journal of International Relations*, 21:4 (2105), 841-866
[53] Waltz, *Theory of international politics*, 61
[54] Ibid, 73

Unlike Mearsheimer however, his branch of Structural Realism is usually understood as 'Defensive Realism'. He argues that units in the system, all face common pressures that they are obliged to build their national policy around[55]. This results in a Balance of Power, where states will naturally seek to conform to this balance to maintain their overall security in the system. So, unlike Mearsheimer who argues that states' security is best preserved by the pursuit of hegemony and thus an active stance, for Waltz states' security is best preserved by conforming to the balance.

Waltz is even more hard-line than Mearsheimer on the irrelevance of unit level attributes on the system level. This of course includes internal policy, regime type, politics and indeed revolution as just changes of such internal attributes. Thus, for Waltz, revolution is primarily an ideological phenomenon that can be relegated to the place of a mere unit attribute. When he does treat the revolutionary question directly, it is to refute the understandings of Kissinger and Morgenthau. Both had formulated some notion of the character of world order; legitimate world order trending to stability and peace and revolutionary world order trending to instability and war. Waltz however rejects this argument as 'circular' and ultimately irrelevant to the overall conduct of international politics[56].

Where it could be argued that revolution has a place in this theoretical framework, is along the lines of the transformation of material power I have explained. Indeed, this would appear to be a fruitful line of inquiry: if units in the structure change significantly so as to force a change in other units, does this not constitute a change in the structure itself? In fact, Waltz acknowledges this:

> 'I, like Durkheim, think of unit-level processes as a source both of changes in systems and of possible changes of systems, hard though it is to imagine the latter. Neither structure nor units determine outcomes. Each affects the other.'[57]

However, he quickly and comprehensively qualifies this by arguing that choosing which domestic variable to include when defining structure, is problematic. Against one of his critics (as one might expect in 'a response to my critics') - Ruggie - he says that: ' the units of an anarchic system develop new qualities through changes of "property rights;' of "social formation;' and of "state/society relations", or presumably through changes in the

[55] Ibid, 72
[56] Ibid 62-64
[57] Kenneth Waltz, 'A Response to my Critics' in Robert Keohane (Ed.) *Neorealism and its Critics,* (New York: Columbia University Press 1986), 328

quality of weaponry, or whatever, he would have us say that the system has been transformed. Structures would then no longer show us a purely positional picture of society. Ruggie would lower the level of abstraction by adding to structures more information about the characteristics of units and of unit level processes. Structure, properly defined, is transposable' and that by doing so one sacrifices 'theoretical acuity' for 'rich and dense description'[58].

I think thus that, whilst revolution as a unit-level variable could be considered in Waltzian Neorealism, indeed precisely such arguments have been presented to him, Waltz quite clearly and concisely rejects it. In John Mearsheimer however, one finds a Neorealist with a little more leeway.

2.3 Mearsheimer and the Amplification of Power

John Mearsheimer is the primary proponent of the Offensive Realism branch of Structural Realism. He is also perhaps one of the most well-know and influential working IR scholars of today. As I touched on previously, Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism is almost solely concerned with the state on the international level. In his words, Offensive Realism 'Pays little attention to domestic politics like ideology'[59]. This of course includes the phenomenon of revolution, which he only considers post factum. Unto itself, this is an interesting observation, since much of Mearsheimer's *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* draws from the European experience of the Napoleonic Wars and the two World Wars; all being wars deeply entangled with the revolutionary states of France, Russia and Germany. The difference is that in Mearsheimer, revolutions are simply taken for granted as a unit in the system and analysed as such. But as I have discussed, revolution can radically alter the states access to power and the intermediaries between them[60].

Mearsheimer's theory of international relations is predicated on five key assumptions:

1. International Power is Anarchic
2. Great Powers possess military capability.
3. No state is certain about another's intentions.
4. Survival is the primary goal of states (privileges security above wealth for example)

[58] Ibid, 330
[59] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 20
[60] Bukovansky, 'The altered state and the state of nature—the French Revolution and international politics.', 212

5. Great Powers are rational actors[61]

These, along with the assertion that states most effectively guard their security by attempting to maximise power, are the heart of Offensive Realism. For the remainder of this section, I will assess each in turn.

The assumption that international power is anarchic is one shared across almost all realist schools and is the bedrock of realism is general. This assumption does not need to be further interpreted.

The assumption that great powers possess military capability. This assumption is that of power. Mearsheimer further elaborates on power, for him it is principally a function of the tangible assets of the state[62]. For most scholars who have written on revolutions in international relations, it is the ideational, ideological and values-based aspects of revolution that are pertinent to its theoretical import[63]. What is under looked however is that revolutions can cause a radical change in the tangible assets available to the state through the transformation of the intermediaries between it and its population and resources. Much higher tax returns, greater military manpower, more efficient exploitation of natural resources through economic changes and such have all been changes observed in the important revolutions of the past. Such things are not whatsoever abstract domains like values and ideology but very real and immediate increases in the overall power (under a Mearsheimian conception) available to the state.

Mearsheimer has acknowledged the importance of this effect in a roundabout way in a paper on Nationalism and Realism, where he argues that realism and nationalism are inextricably linked and that it has played a central role in creating the modern state system[64]. Though this paper does not treat revolutions directly, revolution has played a pivotal role in the creation and fermentation of nationalism. From Revolutionary France, to the 1848 revolutions across Europe, to Meiji Japan, Nazi Germany and the Islamic Republic of Iran; revolution and nationalism have been joined at the hip. Which is of course all related to the new power mediations a revolution stimulates, the mass mobilisation aspect, 'infrastructural power' and so on.

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[61] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,* 30
[62] Ibid, 55
[63] For example, Barry Buzan and George Lawson in *The Global Transformation* (2015) look at the ideology of 'progress' associated with revolutions and its spread.
[64] John Mearsheimer, 'Kissing Cousins: Nationalism and Realism', (Chicago 2011). This is an unpublished paper, but available on Mearsheimer's website: https://www.mearsheimer.com/publications/

The assumption that no state can be certain of another state's intentions is important insofar it creates permanent strategic ambiguity between all states in the system. This is aspect of the anarchical system is the key to Walt's understanding of revolutions. Under this assumption, according to Offensive Realism, states do not balance against each other's intentions but against each other's capabilities[65]. As to the previous point then, since a revolution can affect a significant and material change in a state's capabilities, this must force all other states in the system to balance against those new capabilities. There should already be an assumed balancing out against the potential new capabilities of another state following a revolution. Just as in the markets for example, a company is not valued solely on its present balance book, but on its perceived future potential, which makes the markets more efficient in general by rewarding good long-term investments.

The assumption that survival is the primary goal of states is another core assumption of realism in general. For my purposes, it is not necessarily as pertinent as the other Structural Realist assumptions. However, it reinforces the previous points about the necessity of other states in the system to balance against the new capabilities unleashed by revolution. Another important note to make would be that a pre-revolutionary state's survival cannot be threatened by a revolution, at least in the post-Westphalian conception of the state. That which is threatened is the regime and the current body that holds sovereignty, be it a King, Emperor or otherwise. The sovereignty of the state itself however is not violated by revolution but rather transferred.

Finally, the assumption that great powers are rational. This assumption is in many ways the lynchpin of Offensive Realism and Structural Realism in general. A key idea here is that states know their limitations and will act based on them[66]. Under different realist traditions, wars post-revolution have been understood as a matter of ideology, not rational power brokerage. Alan Cassels for example has called the French Revolutionary war a 'war of doctrine', quoting the famous Brissotist construction 'Crusade of all people against all Kings'[67]. Similar claims to 'universality' are echoed in other important revolutions; the Communist International of the Soviet Union or Iran's pan-Islamic pretension for example. Nick Bisley equally writes on the socialising effect of the 'fear' of the export of new ideological norms from revolutionary states that can lead to pre-

[65] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,* 46
[66] Ibid, 38
[67] Alan Cassels, *Ideology and International Relations in the Modern World*, (Routledge 1996), 16-29

emptive war[68]. Such a conception however does not work according to structural realism, but I think it doesn't have to. Just as in regards to my previous points, from a structural realist perspective, it is the new mediations of *material power* that will cause states to change their rationale. This is completely consistent with offensive Realism.

2.4 Walt and the Breakdown in Communication

Walt is another prominent and influential thinker in the domain of Structural Realism. Walt has given the most comprehensive treatment thus far of the place of revolutions in IR theory, through his book *Revolution and War*. Since I have covered it in the literature review, I will just make some brief notes here to contextualise it in its field. His main innovation is the theory of 'Balance of Threat' versus the Waltzian 'Balance of Power' construction[69]. Balance of Threat, unlike Balance of Power, takes into account perception of capabilities, intent and priorities. This goes against Mearsheimer for example, who argues that states cannot know other states intentions thus balance purely against capability or Waltz who argues that states simply conform to common pressures in the system.

With this 'Balance of Threat', Structural Realism has its most comprehensive treatment of revolutions in the international system. For Walt, a revolution can be relevant to the calculus of states in the system based on three criteria. A revolutionary phenomenon may lead to a change in abilities of a state, leading to windows of opportunity. It may lead to changes in priorities of a state, resulting in new political schisms and conflicts. Finally, it can lead to a change in the perception of the revolutionary states' threat or intention, resulting in the perception of advantage on its part. Walt argues that these three effects in conjunction most often encourage war[70].

In general, I am glad of this addition to Structural Realist theory that allocates some genuine theoretical space to revolution and its effects on international order. However, I believe there are some issues and lacunas in Walt's treatment. For one, it lacks some congruity with the rest of the school of Structural Realism. Notably the importance accorded to perceptions and intentions is not in line with other Structural Realist thinkers, as it fundamentally moves away from the primacy of structure and systems level pressures. Secondly, Walt primarily understands revolution insofar as it is an engine for

[68] Bisley, 'Counter-Revolution and International Politics', 55
[69] Stephen Walt, 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power', *International security*, 9:4 (1985), pp. 3–43
[70] Walt, *Revolution and War,* 44

or expediter of war. It changes the calculus of systems levels interactions in general, not solely in regard to the outbreak of war due to perception of threat. Walt's ideas are those most commensurate in Neorealism to those in Classical Realism and indeed in the English School as covered in my literature review. The notion that revolutionary states cause a breakdown in communications is echoed across almost all theoretical branches of Revolution and IR. That it gains a representation even in Neorealism, the school most hostile to domestic variables, should attest to the robustness of this principle.

2.5 Conclusion

In all then, despite Structural Realism being on its surface the most hostile theoretical grouping to revolutions as a factor, I hope to have demonstrated that it is not entirely ignored. Structural Realism has often been maligned as the black sheep of realism, Bukovasnky for example contends that it 'short circuits' our ability to understand historical context with its dogmatic adherence to the abstract[71]. I would counter however that such abstractionism is essential to any field of study, natural or political. Milton Friedman, a theorist in the field of economics articulates this cogently:

> '[The best theories] will be found to have assumptions that are wildly inaccurate descriptive representations of reality, and, in general, the more significant the theory, the more unrealistic the assumptions.'[72].

[71] Bukovansky, 'The altered state and the state of nature', 219
[72] Friedman, Milton, *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1953), 14

3. Classical Realism: Honour, Prestige and the Status Quo

Le droit des gens est naturellement fondé sur ce principe : que les diverses nations doivent se faire, dans la paix, le plus de bien, et, dans la guerre, le moins de mal qu'il est possible, sans nuire à leurs véritables intérêts.

Montesquieu, *L'Esprit des Lois,* I, 3

Classical realism, as eponymously implied, is the 'original' school of realist thought in IR theory. It follows in the traditions of such political thinkers as Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and Thucydides. This school of realism maintains the same basic principles of realism in general, being the anarchical nature of the system, the supremacy of the state and the rational self-interest of states. However, as distinguished from Neorealism for example, it does not insist that it is the pressures of the anarchical system that are the sole determiners of the behaviour of states. Nor does it generally find that security is the sole motivating priority of states.

Classical Realism, as understood today, is not so much a self-conscious school or theoretical branch of International Relations as Structural Realism is. The original authors of this branch, such as Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr, simply understood themselves as 'realists' as opposed to the 'idealists' or 'utopianists', whose brand of foreign policy they opposed. As such, the texts on Classical Realism are not as explicitly theoretical as the Structural Realist texts I have analysed previously. In many ways, they are more like manuals of IR, or 'advice for princes' in the tradition of Machiavelli[73].

Classical and Structural Realism differ in two fundamental ways in terms of their account of revolutionary phenomena.

The first substantial divergence is on questions of morality, norms, customs, values and so on in IR. Where Structural Realism is laser-focused on the political unit of the state as abstracted from its own internal quantities and on the purely material and military aspects of these states, Classical Realism considers that there exists an international community and that states' actions towards each other are influenced by values, history, custom and norms. Morgenthau for example thought that by the 1960's, the lessons of realism had been overlearned, that foreign policy had swung too far in the

[73] Gilpin, 'The Richness of Realism', 304

direction of pure *realpolitik* in ignorance of ethical considerations[74]. Raymond Aron, one of the principal French intellectuals of the 20th century and a contemporary of Morgenthau, thought that it was folly to try to understand the foreign policy of a state without understanding the philosophy of those who govern it[75].

Classical Realism then bears similarity to Constructivism and the English School in IR. As discussed in the first chapter of this paper, the bulk of literature on revolutions in IR comes from the English School, through the lens of 'International Society'. The normative layer which sits atop the international system in Classical Realism can understand revolution in a similar manner; as revolution can affect a rupture in it. Classical Realism, However, remains distinct from these schools primarily in its sole analytical focus on the state as the highest and only relevant level of political unit on the international stage. Though I do not give him a full treatment in this chapter, as I believe the thought of Morgenthau and Aron is more useful to demonstrate the concepts, Edward Hallet Carr bears mentioning here as the progenitor of these ideas. In his primary work on international Relations, *The Twenty Years' Crisis,* Carr's aim is to refute 'utopianism' in IR. His main critique of 'utopianism' is its intellectual rigidity, as it claims that there is some universal moral principle which can guide and direct the relations between nations. He argues that 'relativity' of thought is the essential weapon against this:

> 'The weapon of relativity of thought must be used to demolish the utopian concept of a fixed and absolute standard by which policies and actions can be judged'[76].

Thus, he says that 'theories of international morality are, for the same reason and in virtue of the same process the product of dominant nations or groups of nations'[77]. Which is to say that the morality which every state claims in its actions is relative to the time and place in which they exist, and there is no fixed system of morality or justice in the international sphere. Revolutions then, and their associated ideologies, can be understood as a previously supressed dominant nation attempting to impose its morality on the international system, by way of repudiation of the old system. Thus, it was in

[74] Richard Ned Lebow, 'Classical Realism' in *International Relations Theories,* 63
[75] Raymond Aron, Daniel J. Mahoney and Brian C. Anderson, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations,* (New York & London: Routledge 2017), 600
[76] Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis' 1919-1939: An introduction to the Study of International Relations,* (London: Macmillan 1946), 75
[77] Ibid, 79

revolutionary France and its crusade of 'all people against all kings'[78] and Soviet Russia's 'Communist International' and Meiji Japan's 'East Asian co-prosperity' sphere.

The second divergence of Structural Realism from Classical Realism is in the motive of states. In structural realism, security or survival is generally the only motivating factor of states. Classical realism recognises that states, like people (being merely groups of politically organised people), have motivations outside of and even contrary to their security. Namely, this is manifested in the desire for glory and prestige. This concept in Classical Realism goes all the way back to Thucydides. Quoting an anonymous Athenian on the motivation of Athens, speaking before the Spartan Assembly he says that 'fear being our principal motive, though honour and interest afterwards came in'[79]. This 'honour' of the Athenians came to be their downfall, as recounted in books VI and VII of the Thucydides' *History,* when they attempted to invade the far-off island of Sicily, in what Nicias (an Athenian observer) described as a 'mad dream of conquest'[80]. Thus, it oft is the case that revolutionary states which seek not merely to break with the status quo are subsequently dragged into their own 'mad dream of conquest' which goes manifestly against their security interests. Napoleon and Hitler are prime examples of this tendency, and the Soviet Union too, though its Hubris was repaid much later, was obsessed with its prestige to the point of building a wall around West Berlin to avoid the embarrassment of its fleeing populace.

The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to exploring these two aspects of Classical Realism and how they can be used to understand revolutions. I will do this through the lens of two of the foremost thinkers in Classical Realism: Raymond Aron and Hans Morgenthau. Through Morgenthau, I will primarily explore the aspect of the Status Quo in IR and through Aron primarily the question of prestige and glory, though both contain elements of each other.

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[78] Cassels, *Ideology and International Relations,* 16-29

[79] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War,* Trans. Richard Crawley, Accessed online at http://classics.mit.edu//Thucydides/pelopwar.html, 1.75.3

[80] Ibid, 6.13.1. Of note, it is generally accepted that Thucydides agrees with Nicias, see Hans-Peter Stahl, "Speeches and the Course of Events in Books Six and Seven of Thucydides," in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Thucydides*, Ed. Jeffrey Rusten (Oxford 2009), 346

3.1 Morgenthau and the Status quo

Hans Morgenthau, who was a German-American scholar and professor, is oft cited as the intellectual bedrock of realism in IR. Though not the first to write on International Relations, nor the first to assert the supremacy of power in International Relations; his *Politics Among Nations,* remains one of the most influential books on the topic. Though Morgenthau's body of thought on IR is vast, the aspect most pertinent to the topic at hand is that of the 'Status Quo' in the international system. Revolutions, as understood through Morgenthau, are intrinsically contrary to that status quo, and seek to rupture it. However, before addressing this point specifically, it is necessary to explore some foundational ideas which contextualise it.

What is often misinterpreted is that Morgenthau's realism advocates a cold and austere *realpolitik* which eschews all moral and ethical concerns in IR. In fact, for Morgenthau, all political actions have moral significance, but they must be understood through the context of time and place[81]. What realism rejects, in the words of Morgenthau, is the 'moralistic-legalistic' approach to international politics[82]. This is to say that such approaches are concerned with what ought to be rather than what is in international affairs and so most often fail to meet their objectives. This is in contrast with domestic politics, where Morgenthau asserts that the struggle for power is still paramount, but that this struggle is mediated is through institutions and laws and processes and so on which often negate the last resort to violence. For Morgenthau, such mediations do not exist on the international level, any appearance of such is merely illusory or simply instrumental of power politics at that moment (The Congress of Vienna, The League of Nations and now the United Nations for example). Thus, 'naked power' is the rule, with the exception of 'prestige' which I shall touch on in a section on Aron.

The core of Morgenthau's thought is on power. Specifically, he understands International Relations as 'Interest defined in terms of power'[83]. As opposed, for example, to the study of economics which would be interest defined in terms of wealth. As differentiated from the neorealists then, such a conception, as in Aron, does not place security at the centre of a state's motivations. Rather, it is the state's interest as it relates to power. Interest however is contingent upon the specificities of the day[84]. Morgenthau

[81] Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Thompson, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace,* 6th Ed. Rev. Kenneth Thompson, (New York: Knopf 1985), 13
[82] Ibid, 15
[83] Ibid, 5
[84] Ibid, 11

also specifically rejects that IR can be understood through personal motive and ideological preferences:

> 'A realist theory of International Relations, then, will guard against two popular fallacies: the concern with motives and the concern with ideological preferences'[85].

He sees ideology rather as a veil for the conduct of power politics: 'International Politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power'[86]. This is how Morgenthau theorizes International Relations, and in this regard, he identifies the international with the domestic. He asserts that the difference 'is one of degree and not of kind'[87]. He divides the struggle for power on the international stage into three categories: to keep power, to increase power and to demonstrate power. In other terms, this can be read as policies of the Status Quo, policies of Imperialism and policies of Prestige, which is an instrument of the latter two but nonetheless distinct from them[88].

In the few places that Morgenthau has directly addressed revolutionary states, it has been in reference to this rupture of the Status Quo:

> 'Which revolutionary party that see a chance for changing the hated status quo by extra legal means could be persuaded to go to a court of law and have the legality of the status quo confirmed?'[89].

Thus, for Morgenthau revolutions are inherently imperialist in nature as they seek to change the status quo and their struggle for power is often realised through glory and prestige seeking as they seek to prove the righteousness of their own preferred world order. But I will first elaborate a little on what Morgenthau considers the Status Quo to be.

A state's interest in keeping power, or maintaining the Status Quo, is an inherently conservative policy. Morgenthau goes to lengths to note that Empires, once constituted as such, most often pursue this policy as they seek to conserve what they have won. Thus, somewhat counter-intuitively, the policy of empires is not one of imperialism which is the policy which precedes empire. Morgenthau argues that the Status Quo is the normative state around which legal and moral frameworks are constructed to justify, thinking here for example of the Treaty of Versailles which reset the Status Quo in

[85] Ibid, 6
[86] Ibid, 31
[87] Ibid, 52
[88] Ibid, 53
[89] Hans Morgenthau, 'The Machiavellian Utopia, *Ethics,* 55:2 (January 1945), 166

Europe. What Morgenthau argues is erroneous in the conception of such frameworks is that they are taken to be the standard for what International Politics *ought* to be, rather than simply a statement of what is. Thus, statesmen use this Status Quo and the legal and moral boundaries it has set as if it were a law that must be obeyed or a moral principle which must be observed. This is the 'Moralistic-Legalistic' approach which his realism rejects.

A modern example of the contradictory nature of such a conception might be the warrants issued by the International Criminal Court and its precursors like the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The only warrants that have been successfully served are those which already accord with the prevailing Status Quo of International Politics, and which simply confirm its continuity, being American hegemony and its rules based international order. The ICTY convicted participants in the Yugoslavian Wars, which had been intervened in by an American led coalition with UN support. The ICC has mostly convicted terrorists and the leaders of rebel groups in Africa, again which were pursued with UN support and taken into custody through western power politics. Other warrants have been issued but have no reasonable hope of being served. For example, most recently and most prominently the warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who challenges the Status Quo. That his arrest could only be brought about through power, shows that legal mechanisms like this are instrumental of the Status Quo rather than aspirational to a certain desired world order.

However, the dimension through which the phenomenon of revolution can be best understood in Morgenthau's thought, is what Morgenthau calls Imperialism. This an inherently transgressive policy, which seeks to overthrow the status quo[90]. Morgenthau contends that there are three purposes of imperialism: world empire, continental empire or local preponderance.[91] They are unified however in their common aim of overthrowing the Status Quo. He has argued that 'whenever nations cannot change the status quo peacefully, they will try to change it by war'[92]. Social revolutions on the scale discussed here always seeks to overthrow or at least challenge the international status quo; just as the domestic status quo has been overthrown. New conceptions of legitimacy and moral principles challenge international norms and the international legal system is outright abandoned. Theda Skocpol argues the same in her *states and social revolutions,* noting that new revolutions seek to 'consolidate' their space in the world order, or they could not

[90] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 68
[91] Ibid, 70
[92] Hans Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics,* (London: Latimer House 1947), 90

be considered successful[93]. Morgenthau also argues that revolution is almost always ideologically justified, as it carries the 'burden of proof' for its actions[94]. This is quite consistent with the manner in which revolutionary states conduct their early foreign policy.

Revolutionary France and Russia (1789 and 1917) both resulted in a radical shift in the fabric of their domestic politics and resultingly found the international status quo in which they were placed to be intolerable. Similarly, Meiji Japan and Nazi Germany, both sought to overthrow the status quo. At first, in search of local preponderance and in repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles respectively. Later, this accelerated to desire for world empire in World War II and a total bouleversement of the global order as it was.

Even in cases where revolution does not result in wars of aggression, the challenge to the status quo can be manifested in a defensive war as the war comes about due to the disturbance of the status quo[95]. This logic can be applied to revolutionary Iran in 1979, which although it was not the aggressor in the gulf war against Iraq, this war was nonetheless resultant of the sudden transformation of Iran's interests and its place in the world order. Similarly, I would argue that Revolutionary Russia withdrawing from World War I was a defensive or passive challenge to the status quo, as it upset the established balance of power in Europe which, through its complex network of alliances, had launched the war in the first place.

3.2 Aron, Homogeneity and the 'Amour-Propre' of States

Raymond Aron is one of the principal intellectuals and philosophers of the 20th century. Though his topics and interests were many and varied, he wrote extensively on international relations, in correspondence with and following from Morgenthau[96].

Peace and War contains the bulk of his writing on this subject. It is an extensive and broad work, intending to be a comprehensive theoretical, praxeological and historical review of International Relations. He covers theoretical precepts like the nature of power, human nature and wartime strategy and tactics. He also covers 'diplomatic-strategic'

[93] Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions,* 163-166
[94] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations,* 107
[95] Ibid, 105-107
[96] In Morgenthau's review of *Peace and War,* he acknowledges it 'is political analysis of the very first order'. Hans Morgenthau, 'Review of Peace and War', *The American Political Science Review,* 61:4 (Dec. 1967)

conduct, exploring how foreign policy should be pursued by states, as a well as how it has been historically. His main thrust here is that International Relations must be 'adaptable' and that 'prudence' is the diplomat's greatest friend[97]. The whole body of work is too broad to analyse in its entirety here, and for my purposes not all of his thought is relevant. I will be exploring his thought on the nature of the domestic-international divide, power, and what animates/constraints international politics. Of note, Aron was an extensive and prolific writer in all areas of politics, economics, sociology and philosophy. However, the overwhelming majority of his thought on IR is contained in *Peace and War* which is one of his longest and most detailed single works. Thus, I will be principally focussing on this book in this section[98].

Aron defines International Relations, as a field distinct from political science and political philosophy as 'relations between political units, each of which claims the right to take justice into its own hands and to the sole arbiter of the decision to fight or not to fight'[99]. Aron consistently uses the language of 'political organised collectives' and 'political units' to describe states, in what is now recognisably realist or even neorealist language. Aron goes some length further to firmly distinguish domestic and international politics: 'Power on the international scene differs from power on the national scene because it does not use the same means nor function over the same terrain'[100]. In terms of a state's power on the international stage, he takes quite a material view in general: 'The status of a political unit within an international system is fixed by the size of material or human resources that it can devote to diplomatic-strategic action'[101]. Aron equally identifies the possibility of armed conflict between states to be the arbitration of last resort. He says that, although states exist within a normative order and an international community, the 'possible and legitimate recourse to violence' between them is the defining factor. As noted previously, for Aron this is the essential difference between national and international politics. It also speaks to a general realist scepticism of the puissance of international law.

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[97] Aron, *Peace and War*, 600

[98] José Colen and Elisabeth Dutarte-Michaut (Eds.), *The companion to Raymond Aron*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), for an overview of Aron. Contained in the indices here are many references to revolutions, but for the most part these are in reference to the French revolution on which Aron wrote extensively and which is not directly relevant to the topic at hand.

[99] Aron, *Peace and War*, 8

[100] Ibid, 52

[101] Ibid, 69

Now, that having all been said, Aron is certainly not to be conflated with the Structural Realists, for whom power politics, security and material resources is the be all and end all. The main divergence of Classical Realists from Structural Realists in this sense is that they do not view security as the sole motivating desire of states and subsequently that there is a morality or at least a normative values system baked into the International System. This is also true of Aron. Aron, divergent even from other Classical Realists, proposes that not only is security not the only goal of states, but that there is in fact no end goal of states whatsoever[102]. This he contrasts to studies which are operational, like physics, or even economics for which there can be testable results such as economic maximisation. He firmly rejects what would become a Structural Realist argument, that states seek to conquer and achieve hegemony for security purposes too:

> 'if states sought to be great in order to enjoy security, they would be victims of a strange illusion'[103].

In Classical Realism, revolution is generally understood on two levels. That of the effect of normative challenge to the prevailing order (homogeneity vs heterogeneity) and that of revolutionary foreign policy driven by ideology rather than security. It is on the second level which I think Aron is more pertinent, especially on the idea of the Amour-Propre of states. I will address first however the Normative order and the two-way socialisation of revolutionary states on the world order.

Aron rejects the notion that the pressures and incentives of states are generally comparable across all space and time. Rather, a key aspect of Aronian thought in International Relations is that a certain normative order is imposed on states in the system[104]. This normative order however is not static and varies according to times and mores, thus realism must be adaptable to the order of the day. Adjunct to this then is the idea that there are homogenous regimes versus heterogenous regimes. That is, states which all have similar constituting ideas of legitimacy such as the aristocratic European states during the Concert of Europe or the liberal democratic democracies of today. This is in contrast to states which have 'heterogenous' constituting legitimacies, the quintessential modern example being the United States and the Soviet Union[105]. There are also examples in far history such as the Greek states and the Persian empire, whose

[102] Ibid, 18
[103] Ibid, 70
[104] Ibid, 608
[105] Ibid, 675

oriental 'despotism' the Greeks turned their noses at. Aron contends that frictions in legitimacy and ideology like this can be a catalyst for conflict. This is an aspect through which revolutions have been studied in Aronian thought before[106]. This idea is interrelated with the 'Status Quo' effect as discussed in Morgenthau, so I will not elaborate further on it here, but rather study a second, underutilised element of Aron's IR, being the 'Amour-Propre' of states.

This idea that ideology and pride can animate inter-state warfare is key in Classical Realism. Aron notes: 'Political units have the Amour-Propre as people do, perhaps they are even more sensitive'[107]. This simple and seemingly obvious observation is sorely missed in Structural Realism. States can and do calculate their diplomatic actions based on such ideological questions, and even at the detriment of their overall security. An example that Aron uses to make this point is France's failure to punish Germany's re-occupation of the Rhineland, which, although they would have been justified in doing both according to International Law at the time and the overall security of the state, they failed to do due to an ideological adherence to non-interference. Though this applies equally to Hitler's folly in continually expanding Germany's war in the years to follow. Thus, for Aron, to understand the foreign policy of a state, it is essential to understand the 'philosophy of those who govern it'[108]

I think the most interesting strain in Aronian thought on this topic, is that that states have no set goals at all. Their desires are changeable and contingent. What is missed in the prior outlined formulations and what is well articulated by Aron is the 'Amour-Propre' of states. This idea in International Relations even predates the field itself. Enlightenment thinking on relations between states, couched as it was in the context of the Concert of Europe, was also predisposed to this notion, which Aron draws on. David Hume, not often cited in International Relations literature in fact wrote an essay on the topic, in which he argues that competition between states is more often a matter of this pride, a desire to be first amongst equals. This he argues was the primary animating force of the centuries of warfare between the Greek city states, which he calls 'wars of emulation rather than wars of politics'[109]. He goes on to say that this is the reason that large empires inevitably fail and wither away, from Rome to the Hapsburgs. The

[106] Bisley, 'Counter-Revolution and International Politics'
[107] Aron, *Peace and War*, 77
[108] Ibid, 600
[109] David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary,* Eugene Miller Ed., (Indiana: Liberty Fund 1987), 334

momentary passions which drove their expansion is forgotten generation after generation[110].

This is an idea which, along with the Amplification of material power and the challenge to the Status Quo, is core to understanding social revolutions in IR. Revolutionary France, Soviet Russia, the Meiji Restoration in Japan, the Islamic Iranian revolution to name some prominent examples are all animated in this way. For different reasons, and enabled by new materials mediations, they seek not to challenge international norms, but a *bouleversement* of them. As Aron puts it: 'A state's policy is revolutionary if its victory would involve the collapse of traditional states, the ruin of the old principle of legitimacy.'[111].

3.3 Conclusion

As compared to Structural Realism, Classical Realism (or simply realism as it was known contemporaneously) takes a more granular and nuanced view of International Relations. From Carr to Morgenthau to Aron, each of these thinkers went to pains to emphasise that relations between sovereign communities are highly changeable and in a constant state of flux. There is no ultimate principle to which states aspire, or universal moral code which they obey. In a world of anarchy, might makes right. But, might is more complex than military force and comprises the force of opinion, ideology determination and so on[112]. Through the lens of these theories, revolution cannot be solely understood as a security dilemma and the reactions of the revolutionary states and the system in which it appears cannot be rationalised solely in this way.

The core lesson from classical realism on revolution, is to understand the context of the time and the challenge to the existing normative order that a revolutionary state presents. Both Raymond Aron and Hans Morgenthau see a mirroring of the dynamics of domestic and international politics, that both are a struggle for power, filtered through ideology, prestige, morality and legality. The difference on the international level is that violence and war is the only way this struggle can be mediated outside of an existing normative superstructure. Indeed, social revolution almost always leads to war and often on an immense, unprecedented scale.

The concept of competition for prestige is equally an important lesson from Classical Realism, which is entirely missed in Structural Realism. States can compete,

[110] Ibid, 341
[111] Aron, *Peace and War,* 85
[112] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis,* 72

even against their long-term security interests, simply for the sake being the princeps in the society of states. The amour-propre of states is a key factor to consider in the behaviour of revolutionary states. Prestige gives credibility and acceptance to states in the international system that can outlast even their material power (the latter years of the British Empire for example). For a revolutionary state seeking to consolidate its position in a status quo which does not accept it, the demonstration of power through military action is essential. This could be theorised as the reason for the French revolutionary wars in its immediate aftermath (as opposed the overthrow of the Status Quo under Napoleon), the nascent Russian SFSR's flurry of military interventions in what was the Russian Empire's sphere of influence, Meiji Japan's sudden break with the long-standing policy of isolationism.

Conclusion

When, on the 5th of May 1789, the delegates of the three Estates of France were convened in the États-Généraux, not one amongst them imagined that not four years later the King's decapitated head would be displayed to a cheering crowd in the newly renamed Place de la Révolution. On the 9th of January 1917, Vladimir Lenin said in a lecture to a group of Swiss workers: 'We of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution.'[113]. That same year the Bolsheviks would seize control of the Winter Palace. In 1928, Hitler's Nazi party received 3% of the vote in Germany's federal election. By 1934, he was the undisputed Dictator of Germany and the Nazi party would go on to profoundly transform German society.

Some Scholarship has suggested that the time of great revolutions is past, that they are 'an historically limited phenomenon'[114]. But revolutions are unpredictable. Thus far, no political order or human institution has lasted eternally. Thus, the best one can do is to assume the world and its systems will change and attempt to rationalise that process. Revolutions have been one of the most puissant engines of change in the world. International Relations, the academic discipline which tries to understand the nature of world order, must include a theory for this phenomenon if it claims to be comprehensive. IR scholarship of course is not unitary and as I covered in this chapter, some schools, principally the English School, have made a serious attempt to develop a theory of revolutions in world order. However, the original and perhaps still the dominant school of IR theory, realism, has not. This to me, seems a shame, since Realism's greatest strength as a theory is in explaining and analysing war, conflict and violence, which needless to say is inherent to revolutions. As to why this might be, there could be any number of reasons[115], principally though I posit that it is due to the axioms of realism: that the state is the only relevant actor on the international stage and that their relations are governed by the system of anarchy between them. However, I think this is an assumption that has arisen from the predominance of Structural Realism and the relative decline of Classical Realism which does consider states' individual attributes. I argue that there are four main themes through which revolutions' impact on word order can be understood in Realism: Amplification of material power, Challenge to the Status Quo, the 'Amour-Propre' of

[113] Vladimir Lenin, 'Lecture on the 1905 Revolution', *Lenin Internet Archive* (2005) https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/index.htm

[114] Samuel P. Huntington., Political Order in Changing Societies, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 265

[115] I discuss this more in this paper's section on 'Revolution and Realism'

states, and Breakdown of communication. Taken individually, each does not provide a satisfactory answer, but in conjunction, we approach a more satisfying and cross-disciplinary understanding.

Amplification of material power applies principally to Structural Realism. As I argued in that chapter, revolutions have proven again and again to have a profound structural impact on the State's access to its material and manpower capabilities, through a transformation of the ways in which power is mediated between society-at-large and the state per se. In a Structural Realist world of strict self-help anarchy, this has profound implications for the international system, forcing competition and, for Mearsheimer, enabling a play for hegemony. Samuel Kent, who wrote a Thesis on Structural Realism and Revolution at Boston College put it this way: 'deep macro-structural trends are transnational and hence affect the material condition of state-units system-wide'[116]. However, it should be noted that for some Neorealist Scholars, like Kenneth Waltz, this effect is still largely irrelevant to the structure of the international system overall.

The challenge to the Status Quo is the most important way in way Revolution can be theorised in Classical Realism. It forms part of the thought of all the major authors discussed in this paper. Kissinger talks about 'legitimacy', Carr about periods of 'dominant nations', Aron about 'Homogenous vs Heterogenous' orders and Morgenthau about the Status Quo but they are all more or less the same idea. Which is that atop the anarchic system between states, there exists a certain normative order which regulates to an extent the rules of the game. When all major states agree on these normative principles, there is stability. When there are states which are contrary, there is instability and increased likelihood of conflict. This idea is intuitive, but it is necessarily excluded from structural realism since it proscribes that states are not only motivated by security, but by normative concerns also. A revolutionary state, almost by definition, is contrary to the existing normative order. Be it by new principles of legitimacy (France, Iran), Ideology (Russia, China) or an explicit imperialist foreign policy (Nazi Germany, Meiji Japan).

The Amour-Propre of states (as Aron puts it) or prestige, is a highly underappreciated factor in realism today, and it is especially relevant to revolutionary states. That states will be motivated to compete for pride alone, even contrary to their security, has been a realist concept since Thucydides. From Ancient Athens to Napoleonic France to Nazi Germany, states again and again have compromised their security merely

[116] Samuel Kent, 'On Revolution and Realism: A Structural Realist Theory of Revolution', (BA Thesis, Boston College 2013), 92

to be the first amongst the others. Revolutionary states especially, are highly motivated by this factor. Like an animal which is injured, they are at their most aggressive when they are vulnerable and insecure.

Finally, the breakdown of communications between a revolutionary state and the rest of world order. Robustly argued by Walt in *Revolution and War,* newly revolutionary states dissolve the pre-existing modes of communication and understanding between themselves and the rest of the world. Neither side knows what to perceive as a threat, how to judge each other's military capacities, paranoia is rife. Even on a praxeological level, a revolutionary state's talent pool is drained, the diplomatic and bureaucratic corps are diminished, and institutional memory is lost.

Taken individually, each of these observations are interesting. Taken together however, and one begins to form a broader picture of how revolution is explained and understood in realist thought. Being a rogue state to the Status Quo causes states to be insecure and act on their amour-propre to prove themselves. Amplified material capacities combined with a breakdown in communication causes outside states to fear for their security. Breakdown in communication means states no longer understand where the revolutionary states stand normatively, if they still respect the rules of the game. With Amplified material capacities, a revolutionary state may be incentivised to starts conflict not for any security seeking reason but merely to demonstrate their newfound power. Of course, this is not a systematic theory and indeed the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how Revolution can be theorised through existing realist first principles, not necessary to advance an entirely novel approach.

Revolutions are dauntingly complex. To describe them as multi-faceted even seems reductive, I would rather say they are omni-faceted. Ergo, does not it equally seem reductive to distil their impact on the international stage into these four attributes? On this, I would borrow from enduring wisdom of Carr and say that such a categorisation as this is simply necessary for 'clear thinking about international relations'[117]. I would also posit, by way of simplistic observation, that revolutions would have an impact on the international system is intuitive. In this paper, I hope to have vindicated this intuition through realist thought. It is in that power of intuition also which the strength of Classical Realism lies and without which a realist understanding of Revolution would not go very far. In a way, the nomenclature of 'Classical' Realism somehow marks this tradition as

[117] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis,* 150. In Carr, this is in reference to the categorisation of state morality, but the concept applies.

antiquated and quaint, which does a disservice to the depth and nuance of thought which it carries; a secondary observation which I hope has been elucidated in this paper.

Finally, realism has always been a practical school of thought, 'advice to princes', right back to Machiavelli. There is enormous value in having some axiomatic understanding of these transformative world events. Where and when these events will occur defies prediction and I would go so far as to say that it naïve to think it will never happen again. If conflict, war and revolution is inevitable, we shall be glad to not have forgotten the lessons of history.

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