
Roundtable: The Battle Rages On

John Mearsheimer versus Paul Rogers, Richard Little, Christopher Hill,
Chris Brown and Ken Booth

Editor's introduction

In vol. 19(2) pp. 139–52 we published John Mearsheimer's E.H. Carr Memorial Lecture, entitled 'E.H. Carr vs Idealism: the Battle Rages On'. The lecture threw down a gauntlet to teachers and researchers of international politics in Britain, so *International Relations* asked the five last chairs of the British International Studies Association (BISA) how they had been provoked. Their responses are printed below, followed by a final word by Professor Mearsheimer.

The 2004 Carr Memorial Lecture was a memorable academic event. The Old Hall in the University of Wales Aberystwyth, where Carr had delivered his inaugural lecture on the same day in 1936, was overflowing. Even those challenged by Professor Mearsheimer's arguments warmed to the way he spoke his mind, addressed big themes, enjoyed the cut and thrust of debate, and explained his position with great clarity. At a time when the discipline is split into ontological tribes who speak only to themselves, and in their own languages, it was refreshing to hear a scholar seeking to connect, even if the medium was 'battle'.

Missing the point

Paul Rogers, BISA Chair 2003–4

John Mearsheimer's central concern in this lecture is that British international relations is essentially dominated by idealism, that it is not possible to identify a single significant theorist of realism in British academe and that E.H. Carr himself would, if alive today, have difficulty in getting a chair in a British university. Mearsheimer sees idealism as the dominant discourse and intentionally so as post-Cold War idealists:

focus mainly on controlling what people think and say, and doing everything possible to make sure their discourse, and not realism, is dominant. The idealists' emphasis on creating hegemonic ideas is coercive in nature and thus cannot help but foster intolerance towards competing world views, especially realism. This is why realist theorists are absent from British universities today.

Mearsheimer believes this as a cumulative feature of British IR, citing the founding, 46 years ago, of the British Committee on International Relations Theory



as one early milestone. The goal of Cold War idealists at that time was to accept 'that the balance of power played a role in international politics' but to minimise its importance, and he argues that British idealism has evolved further over the past two decades in a manner that makes it far more hostile to realism. The process has thus been underway for close to half a century but has accelerated more recently.

Apart from the intrinsic danger of any academic discipline being dominated by a single paradigm, he has a particular concern that idealism has become dominant in British IR to the extent of influencing current policy and future generations of leaders: 'They [idealists] believe they can take us to the promised land because they have significant influence over how large numbers of influential people think about world politics.' He comments that 'The idealist enterprise is all about domination, not peaceful co-existence.' His concern about influence is elaborated in that:

The problem with having realists competing in the marketplace of ideas is that they might convince some impressionable young students – maybe even a lot of them – that there is no such thing as international society or a security community, and states should therefore worry about their position in the global balance of power.

Throughout his discourse, there is the underlying concern that the idealists consistently downplay the significance of military power.

Some might argue that his view of British IR is a caricature, but it is possible to go beyond this facile response and take it at face value. If, indeed, international relations has been dominated for some decades by an idealist paradigm, is it possible to detect an effect in terms of UK security policy, or even a more general policy discourse? Has there been, if idealism is so dominant, a clear parting of the ways, an Atlantic divide rooted in a diversification of theory? The evidence may be mixed but is hardly conclusive to his case.

Consider, for example, developments in the dominant US security paradigm before and after 9/11. Prior to that disastrous day, a neo-conservative agenda was in full swing, with a distinct unilateral impetus exemplified in many ways. Multilateral security agreements were increasingly viewed with suspicion if not outright opposition, ranging from the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Antiballistic Missile Treaty through to concerns over the control of arms transfer, anti-personnel landmines and even the strengthening of the bio-weapons convention and, ultimately, the Kyoto climate change convention.

Three months before 9/11, Charles Krauthammer could comment with typical eloquence:

Multipolarity, yes, when there is no alternative. But not when there is. Not when we have the unique imbalance of power that we enjoy today – and that has given the international system a stability and essential tranquillity that it had not known for at least a century.

The international environment is far more likely to enjoy peace under a single hegemon. Moreover, we are not just any hegemon. We run a uniquely benign imperium.¹

There may well be an argument that neo-conservatives are idealists of a sort, but the impact of 9/11 was certainly to embed the realist discourse in the US body politic, with a vigorous and global military response. As well as terminating two regimes (so far) the response has embraced substantial detention without trial, the development of a policy of pre-emption, not least against greater and lesser members of the 'axis of evil', a centralisation of the intelligence and security apparatus, and defence budgets that are beginning to match the levels of the Cold War.

Are there parallels, albeit at a lower level, in Britain, or has the idealist stranglehold of academic international relations begun to have its effect? It is certainly true that some elements of British security policy have undergone changes. The British army reluctantly embraced peacekeeping, first in Croatia and later in Bosnia and Kosovo, and there have been arguments within some of the more interesting recesses of Whitehall that suggest the war on terror cannot be won by military power alone. Some in government argue, if a little tentatively, that there may be connections between socio-economic marginalisation and terrorism, and others accept that climate change could have a substantial security dimension.

In most other respects, though, the British governing elite has long embraced a thoroughly realist perception of military power and continues to do so. Over 20 years ago the Falklands/Malvinas conflict could be fought, costing 1000 lives and over a billion dollars, all to safeguard the lifestyle (not the lives) of 1800 islanders and the 'Britishness' of a quarter of a million sheep. Nor was this an aberration, given the proximity of Margaret Thatcher's mind-set to that of Ronald Reagan in the closing years of the Cold War.

Has New Labour altered this outlook much since 1997? Hardly. The British government has been wholehearted in its embracing of the 'war on terror', Tony Blair is George Bush's closest ally and the British may well stay in Iraq for as long as their US counterparts – decades, not years, in all probability. It is certainly the case that there were unprecedented anti-war demonstrations two years ago, but little of that impetus came from British international relations in their safe groves of academe.

Here and there elements of government give modest support to arms control, but Britain meanwhile starts the process of modernising its nuclear forces, while professing a belief in the value of controlling proliferation. Perhaps most indicative of all is New Labour's decision to opt for a new generation of massive aircraft carriers, the CVF project. These, the largest warships ever built for the Royal Navy, will give Britain an expeditionary warfare capability that it has largely lacked for 30 years.

Yet we are told that young minds are being trained, and the discourse in international relations fostered, by a cohesive community of idealists that are entrenched in British universities and will accept no opposition. If this is true, then we have to

conclude that it is a lamentably inefficient and dismal project, serving largely to achieve the contrary end to that intended.

Suppose the opposite of Mearsheimer's view of British international relations was true – that the entire academic discourse had been dominated from the 1960s by realists, to the exclusion of other views. If that was the case, one suspects there would have been a powerful counter-reaction, a radicalisation of opinion among students and young researchers that might well have thrown up the kind of vigorous pursuit of alternatives that could have affected the national security discourse. In reality, the identification of British international relations as a discipline dominated by a single mind-set is far from accurate. It is far more complex and multifaceted, as well as being largely predicated against engagement with opinion formers and policy makers. Such engagement is simply not a substantive part of the international relations tradition in Britain.

That being said, there are powerful arguments that the current military postures and doctrines, British as well as American, that owe so much to realism are themselves being found wanting, to the extent that it might not be a bad idea if British academe actually was fostering serious alternative paradigms.

Consider the 'war on terror'. Three and a half years after 9/11 and two years after the initial occupation of Iraq, al-Qaeda and its many affiliates remain more active than before, the Iraq War has so far cost over 20,000 civilian lives, anti-American sentiments are far stronger across much of the world than before, and new generations of paramilitaries are being produced in an increasing number of countries. The International Institute for Strategic Studies can report that 'the substantially exposed US military deployment in Iraq represents al-Qaeda with perhaps its most "iconic" target outside US territory' and 'Galvanised by Iraq, if compromised by Afghanistan, al-Qaeda remains a viable and effective "network of networks"'.²

Such an assessment is largely ignored. Moreover, the more general analysis that deep socio-economic marginalisation is aiding the growth of radical transnational social movements is simply discounted, as is the view that global environmental constraints, such as climate change, are set to produce forms of insecurity that cannot be successfully managed by military control.

Those arguments are just beginning, and may yet lead to the most fundamental questioning of the realist paradigm in 60 years, with realism being seen as misplaced idealism and the idealists recognised as being all too realist. That, though, is another debate that is still to come, yet it is probable that it will be stimulated not by intellectual developments in Britain or the United States, but by thoughtful analysts in the 'majority world', away from the self-absorbed international relations world of the Atlantic community.

Turning back the clock: Mearsheimer resurrects the first great debate

Richard Little, BISA Chair 2001–2

According to John Mearsheimer, British academics in the field of international relations have lost the plot and are failing to confront the real world. More specifically, he argues that in the UK the belief prevails that, by eliminating realist discourse and replacing it with idealist discourse, we can transcend the ‘nasty and dangerous’ world that we currently inhabit. In line with this argument, Mearsheimer then insists that a self-denying ordinance has been introduced by virtually all those teaching international relations in Britain that prohibits all reference to realism.

This is, to say the least, a provocative line of argument and it would be all too easy to rise to the bait that Mearsheimer has dangled before us and respond in an overly defensive and ethnocentric fashion. In an attempt to avoid such a response, I want to extend the issue beyond the British approach to international relations, and in doing so question Mearsheimer’s terms of reference. His argument rests, from my perspective, on a false dichotomy, that was evident when the putative debate between realism and idealism was first initiated, but the dichotomy has become increasingly problematic, as the field has evolved. By lumping together all British academics and labelling them as idealists, Mearsheimer replicates the rhetorical move made by realists during the first ‘great debate’. He turns back the clock more than 50 years and resolutely ignores the significance of the debates that have gone on in the intervening period. As a result, he fails to accommodate either the growing diversity in international relations or the complex cross-cutting cleavages that now exist within the field. These developments have had the effect of fragmenting most, if not all, schools of thought.

Certainly there are now profound schisms within realism and this is not a new development. At the start of the 1980s, Ashley observed an internal tension in realism between practical and technical rationality.³ More recently, neo-realism and neo-liberalism are now often seen to be occupying the same analytical space. Indeed, it can be argued that the discipline is moving to a point where reference to realism as a coherent school of thought is slowly but surely becoming outdated. What Mearsheimer’s sharp distinction between realism and idealism does is to conflate and thereby confuse methodological, ontological and epistemological differences in a way that is simply not helpful for thinking about the theory and practice of international relations.

Mearsheimer, however, is certainly not blind to the developments that have occurred since the first ‘great debate’ took place, and his call for diversity in the way that we teach international relations is to be welcomed. However, this call raises but fails to answer the question of how to handle the growing diversity within the field. As it happens, this is an issue that has been preoccupying me for the past year as Mike Smith and I have struggled to produce the third edition of an introductory reader on world politics that we first put together 25 years ago. The reader is organised around three perspectives: one focusing on power and security,

a second on interdependence and globalisation, and a third on dominance and resistance.⁴ In essence, the perspectives relate to realism, liberalism and Marxism, although we avoid these labels because of the baggage that accompanies them. However, even 25 years ago, we were acutely conscious of the problems raised by the assumption that the discipline can be neatly organised around three perspectives and so we included a short fourth section that contained items that reflected on the nature of perspectives and the existence of additional perspectives.

A second edition of the reader, published in 1991, posed some problems because the Cold War was coming to an end and it was unclear what the consequences would be for a theoretical understanding of international relations. Nevertheless, we felt that the basic structure was still sufficiently robust to provide a useful introduction. But when approached by the publishers a couple of years ago to put together a third edition we were initially very reluctant to proceed. Not only were we concerned about how to accommodate the potential consequences of 9/11, we were also aware that the very idea of trying to study world politics on the basis of competing perspectives is now considered to be anachronistic by many of our younger colleagues. It is, for example, nearly a decade since Ole Wæver discussed 'the rise and fall of the inter-paradigm debate'.⁵

Wæver argued that the idea of dividing the study of IR into three 'incommensurable' paradigms was a product of the 1970s and represented a third 'great debate'.⁶ But by the 1980s, according to Wæver, a fourth debate between rationalism and reflectivism had opened up, with realists and liberals clustering around rationalism and radicals being drawn to reflectivism. Wæver, moreover, saw signs of a new phase emerging, with a growing acceptance that rationalism and reflectivism are not incommensurable methodological approaches, but constitute a useful division of labour. Wæver insisted, therefore, that introducing students to IR via the inter-paradigm debate represents a retrograde step and he argued that the focus should now be on the methodological divide between rationalism and reflectivism.

Following the route mapped out by Wæver, however, would require us to tear up the original blueprint and effectively abandon the prospect of a third edition of the reader. But although we acknowledged that Wæver was raising an important issue, we were far from convinced that his suggestion represented the most effective way of initiating students into the study of international relations. A potential middle has been advanced by Walt.⁷ He argues that the tripartite division is a product of the Cold War, but whereas realism and liberalism have proved to be extremely resilient approaches to theory building and have flourished in the post-Cold War era, by contrast, Marxism has declined in influence and radicals have changed their methodological stance, rejecting a materialist perspective and acknowledging the importance of ideas. As a consequence, Walt places constructivism alongside realism and liberalism to establish a new triptych of theoretical approaches.

It seemed to us, however, that there are problems with this solution. Apart from the fact that Marxism is alive and kicking, constructivism represents a methodology that can, in principle, be extended to liberal and even realist perspectives.⁸ Classical

realists, like Morgenthau, have always acknowledged the crucial importance of ideas in world politics, and indeed he defines power in psychological rather than material terms. But then even Mearsheimer has to acknowledge the importance of nationalism in international relations. This is hardly surprising since it is not possible to make sense of the world without taking the importance of ideas into account.

The bottom line is that while acknowledging that there are always difficulties with any classificatory scheme, we have retained our original structure. In doing so, we are effectively aligned with the tripartite division adopted by Wight and Bull.⁹ Our approach is inherently pluralistic and assumes that we are operating in a complex reality that cannot be captured by any single theoretical framework. At the same time, the approach also assumes that these frameworks help to make sense of the ongoing 'conversation' about the direction that world politics should take. Given this orientation, it would be extremely odd to ignore realism and it may alleviate some of Mearsheimer's concerns to know that we have included sections from *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* in the new edition.¹⁰ But it is clear that we also include a range of authors that Mearsheimer is less willing to acknowledge as realists. But it is unreasonable for Mearsheimer to assume that he holds the monopoly on realist thought. Certainly, our intention is to reveal what Gilpin refers to as the 'richness' of the realist tradition.¹¹

A problem for both offensive and defensive realists is that, in aiming for parsimony, they have cut themselves off from many of the insights that can be gleaned from classical realists like Morgenthau.¹² By the same token, however, our approach does not assume that realism occupies some kind of privileged position in any discussion about international relations. Our position, therefore, coincides with Bull's assessment of the relationship that exists between his conceptions of the international system, the international society and world society.¹³ He insisted that it is important not to 'reify' any of these elements.¹⁴ It follows that 'it is always erroneous to interpret events as if international society were the sole or the dominant element'.¹⁵ Because he is enmeshed in the terms of reference established by the first debate, Mearsheimer fails to grasp this essential point in Bull. By the same token, certainly from Bull's perspective, Mearsheimer's position is inherently problematic because, by privileging the international system, he also reifies it.

There are, of course, many ways of characterising a field of study as complex and diverse as international relations. My quarrel with the realist/idealist divide is that it has always been used for essentially rhetorical purposes. It allows Mearsheimer to make the claim that he is looking at reality as it is, in contrast to the rest of us who apparently look at the world as we would like it to be. But this is a false dichotomy that not only produces a distorted assessment of the field but also generates problems for Mearsheimer.¹⁶ It locks him into a framework that assumes international politics have not changed and will not change. By contrast, theorists like Bull and Morgenthau employ frameworks that allow them to show how factors like nationalism and nuclear weapons transform the nature and texture of world politics. Both assume that world politics have changed in the past and will continue

to change in the future. It is a strange form of realism that makes any other assumption but it perhaps fits the category of what Freedman calls 'unreal realism'.¹⁷

Great attack, wrong war: the misplaced energy of John Mearsheimer

Chris Hill, BISA Chair 1999–2000

John Mearsheimer's knockabout lecture is in many ways an academic reprise of Robert Kagan's famous view of European foreign policy – that a civilisation which has lost its top-dog status has little option but to rationalise its position, with notions like 'civilian power', or in this case 'idealism'.¹⁸ Like Kagan, he scores some palpable hits, not least because there is an important kernel of truth to the analysis. British IR, like the European political class, takes a less bullish and more diffuse view of power than the Americans, because we have less of it. We have a vested interest in thinking up ways to tie down Gulliver and to build a world which suits our own values and interests.

That said, both Kagan and Mearsheimer indulge themselves in some provocative simplifications, which raise the enjoyment level in the debate and have thoroughly stirred the pond-bottom (to adapt the phrase of a famous UK-based idealist) but which ultimately mislead.¹⁹ Kagan has decided to back-track on his portrayal of the Europeans as merely Venus to Washington's Mars, conceding both that they may actually provide useful international public goods and that there may even be some virtue in the European view of the world.²⁰ Mearsheimer may not yet have reached his penitential point, but he ought to recognise that his analysis is more part of the problem than of the solution. If he is right that orthodoxies are the enemies of free-thinking, and that the current British orthodoxy in IR has excluded key elements of international life (and I would be more specific than his generalised whinge about power, pointing to the neglect of topics like foreign policy, diplomacy and strategic studies), then he will not open things up to real pluralism by recourse to the tired dichotomy of realism/idealism. It is not enough, for example, to criticise discourse theorists' lack of interest in engaging in real argument if you then slip into the same kind of academic solipsism. Casting the main issues in terms of a debate between academic schools of thought effectively makes for closure rather than real boundary-crossing. This kind of set-up may appeal through its attractive simplicity, but I do not think we are any better served by a chattering-class debate on realism *versus* idealism than we have been by those other headline-catching dichotomies on the end of history (or not) and the clash of civilisations (or not).

Perhaps I am being too picky here, and should accept that knowledge, as well as political life, does only move on through the operation of robust adversarialism. Yet it is not easy to see how Mearsheimer's argument, intra-IR and artificially transatlantic as it is, illuminates what is really going on in the study of international relations, or how it promotes public understanding of our subject. Part of what so

many people have laboured to do during the astonishing professional growth of IR over the last 40 years (remarkably high in Europe, given we are a bunch of powers in decline) has been the attempt to show that power is multifaceted and as difficult to handle as a magnum in the hands of a 12-year-old. This applies to the US's role in the world as much as to that of the Europeans, and it has been recognised by writers on both sides of the Atlantic. Furthermore, insofar as IR has become an established social science, it buys in everywhere to the notion that all theory has a normative content, realism no less than anything else, and conversely that all normative theories – however apparently ‘idealist’ – have to face up to the implications of power and praxis if they are to have more than scholastic value.

The issue is therefore not that of realism versus idealism, or even of the US versus the UK.²¹ Constructivism is making big inroads into US universities, while those traditionally concerned with the operation of state power, such as diplomatic historians, analysts of foreign policy and strategy and (in particular) area studies specialists, have struggled to find space and resources. This is not, interestingly, due to the absence of realism. The United States was understandably too obsessed with its own role in the world for that to happen, even before 9/11. Rather, it is a consequence of the domination of scholasticism and intellectual fashion. In the US this has tended to take the form of a rational choice, technique-driven approach to politics, itself derived from a mix of economics and realism. In Europe, this has tended to take the form of constructivism. But neither is an exclusive trend. If rational choice predominates in the former, and constructivism in the latter, it matters less than the fact that both are responsible for neglecting some of the key issues in international politics.

Here the key word is ‘politics’. If political science is supposed to be about elucidating the contests in which human beings engage over how to organise their authority structures, much current work on both sides of the Atlantic only does this obliquely and too often obscurely – not, of course, accusations that can be levelled at John Mearsheimer himself. In international relations more specifically, the debate is surely no longer just about power or transcending it through ideals. Mearsheimer correctly points out that E.H. Carr saw right from the start that the issue was more about how to relate power to utopias and vice versa. And by now we should be in a position to be more sophisticated. For example, we can generally recognise: that any state needs to consider the ethical issues which are inherent to foreign policy, and in particular which arise over interventions in the affairs of others; that security and defence are far more complicated issues than a focus on the accumulation of military strength will allow; that successful international organisation involves more than laying down the law and appealing to states' better natures; that ideas condition power but will be shaped by power in turn; that declaratory policy is not self-executing but depends for success on a myriad of factors – domestic, external and to do with the decision-making process; that state foreign policies still matter. This is designed to be an eclectic list, and many other examples could figure on it, the point being simply that the familiar dichotomy around which John Mearsheimer has built his entertaining lecture is insufficient to

do justice to either the strengths or the weaknesses of modern IR scholarship. The strengths are evident even in the wimpish, ideational UK system, and the weaknesses, particularly the fact that the above list of key issues is not often enough our prime concern, are present wherever academic professionalism has set in, not least the United States.

Europeans and Americans concerned with the kind of issues listed above do, of course, exist in healthy enough numbers, but those concerned directly with the nature of international politics as it is practised, and with discussing in terms which are accessible to those who do practise (and suffer) it, increasingly find difficulty in finding space within mainstream IR, wherever they are located. In this sense Mearsheimer is on to something, but has just chosen the wrong target. Current academic orthodoxies in IR do not neglect power; they just treat it in the indirect and often narrow terms referred to above, in relation to rational choice and constructivism. Alternatively, they may be interested in engaging with substantive issues, but cast them in the highly macro (indeed stratospheric) language of globalisation and global governance. Others refuse to accept any particular distinctiveness of international relations, insisting that all politics should be treated under the same heading, with comparative politics and IR merged. Then the focus turns to cross-cutting issue areas such as conflict, political economy or policy networks, without particular reference to the intra- or inter-state context, which seems a touch premature, to say the least.

Probably these latter tendencies are to be found more in continental Europe – where post-1945 there has been a strong current running against the nation-state – than in the US or the UK. Yet the latter's academic practices are increasingly being colonised by bright young researchers from the rest of the EU, who are more attracted by the fair and open university job market in Britain than they are alarmed by its apparently nationalist politics and atlanticist policies.

Returning to 'ideals', which are the subject of Professor Mearsheimer's misplaced anxiety, let us acknowledge that they are critical to our political and academic life – wherever we stand. It is, however, important to distinguish the two most important meanings of the term. The first, hardly exclusive to British academics, is the tendency to substitute hope for experience. This is a decent human instinct but one which does us few favours in the hard world of international politics. The second is the belief in certain principles and the often courageous willingness to stand by them in the face of power. It is an intensively difficult moral and intellectual challenge to know how far these principles should be pursued and at what cost, when they will seem 'unrealistic' to begin with but have also the potential to become a new realism, or orthodoxy, in their turn.

Whether British pragmatism has a better record in relating power to ideals than the American tendency towards crusading can be argued at length. This is, in any case, a matter of official policy. Here we are discussing communities of scholarship, which do not necessarily map onto national foreign policy traditions. As Mearsheimer points out, the English School has been infected by idealism since the early Cold War, when British policy was conventionally realist. US academic

realists, on the other hand, have had to put up with the destructive idealism of their governments, over the Chinese revolution, Vietnam and now Iraq. Whether academic work influences policy or just reflects it is another imponderable. Since Robin Cook's 'ethical dimension of foreign policy', and Tony Blair's conversion to the 'doctrine of the international community', British foreign policy has broken free of its distrust of ideas and the very idea of morality. Arguably, in doing so it took on the changing climate of academic IR in Britain, filtered through certain key individuals and pressure-groups.²² In the United States, on the other hand, we see a few key figures (like John Mearsheimer himself, but also outliers like Joseph Nye, and outsiders like Niall Ferguson) debating the changing nature of American power, embedded in a scholarly mass more interested in discussing the intricacies of balance of power theory or negotiating strategy.

The watershed of 9/11 can be seen as having brought about the 'return of realism'. And many more commentators are now willing to concede the importance of organised violence and other forms of political conflict, after a decade or more of economic optimism. But this is only true up to a point. There are long lead times in changing academic cultures, with their established courses, projects and networks. Nor are we likely to see a widening gap between hard-nosed Americans and innocent Europeans. Both sides have to rethink and rebalance their priorities. A more significant probability is a coarsening of debate everywhere as the pressure from nervous governments and funders to find clear causes and solutions for our present discontents mounts. In this context we are also likely to see academic work sullied by sharper ideological divisions over international politics. Some academics will be drawn to put their ideas at the disposal of power (as with Bernard Lewis over Islam, and as Christopher Greenwood did over the legal case for the Iraq War) while others will resist such 'contamination', preferring to insist on the sanctity of scholarship.²³ Yet others will want involvement in the world, but will seek it as 'public intellectuals', relating as much to civil society as to politicians. Amidst these multiple contestations the old joust between realism and idealism will simply be beside the point.

Towards the end of Professor Mearsheimer's lecture I began to feel sorry for his tribe of realists. Ousted from 'the commanding heights of the discipline' in the UK, it is surely only a matter of time before they start to feel threatened by the 'peaceful hegemonic project' of idealism, which has no doubt already started to make insidious inroads into the US academy. But the realists should get real. It is not these labels which matter, but what we do under and across them. The problems we address and the questions we pose should be judged on their relevance to the great dilemmas of world politics, not on whether they benefit one school or another in a war between the mates.

No jazz on the radio . . . John Mearsheimer and British IR

Chris Brown, *BISA Chair 1997–8*

A few years ago the great British jazz pianist Stan Tracey was interviewed on BBC radio, and announced, *ex cathedra* as it were, that there was virtually no jazz on BBC radio. What about the Monday night big band programme on Radio 2, asked the interviewer. Not jazz, Stan firmly replied. ‘Jazz Record Requests’ every Saturday on 3? Very occasionally, but mostly not. Last week’s live relay from the Edinburgh Festival? Nope. The ‘Jazz Promenade Concert’ at the Albert Hall? Certainly not. The interview continued, becoming increasingly surreal. Still, Tracey made his point entirely to his own satisfaction; jazz was what he and people who played like him did, and since they were not on the radio very often, there was, effectively, no jazz on the radio. QED.

The reader will see where I am going with this. One can envisage a similar conversation with John Mearsheimer. Hedley Bull? Idealist. Martin Wight? Used to be a realist, became an idealist. Lawrence Freedman, Christopher Coker, Colin Gray? Idealist, idealist, idealist (well, surely occasionally touches of realism for Colin). And so on, not just in the UK, but, let it be noted, also in the US, where realists are persecuted, find it difficult to get tenure and are generally downtrodden by liberals.²⁴ On both sides of the Atlantic, all sorts of people who think they are realists find to their surprise that they are actually idealists/liberals – much the same way in which all sorts of musicians who thought they were making jazz find, to their surprise, that in Traceyworld they are not. There are worrying possibilities here that other older figures might fall out of the canon of realist thinkers. Hans J. Morgenthau, for many a rather important example, was given to using the term ‘international society’ with some frequency, and in much the same way as the idealist Bull. Like Bull, he saw it as his task to relay the traditions of European statecraft to a new country/generation that did not instinctively grasp the finer points of that tradition. I am pretty sure it would be possible to find strong indications of idealism in his work. Even Carr himself, as Mearsheimer comes close to acknowledging, is not uncontaminated by idealism (though certainly we can agree he was innocent of liberalism – which, incidentally, is why Wight et al. did not want him on the British Committee; by the 1950s his main interest in life was promoting his Stalinist reading of Soviet history, and even if he had been interested in serving on the Committee, which is doubtful, he would have been unacceptable not for his realism but because of his pro-Soviet sentiments).

I could go on. The simple point is that while it is certainly the case that the number of ‘offensive realists’ à la Mearsheimer is vanishingly small in the UK, and not much larger in the US, the number of people who could lay some claim to being a realist on some not wholly implausible definition of the term is quite substantial. If we take realists to be theorists who believe that there is a qualitative difference between domestic and foreign policy, that the state remains the key international actor, and that power is a centrally important concept in international relations, then there are quite a lot of us around – and I do mean ‘us’, although I would not go all

the way with the first-year student who recently wrote in an essay of ‘hard-line realists like Machiavelli and Chris Brown’.²⁵ Of course, these things are largely a matter of degree – by comparison with John Mearsheimer I am a sloppy idealist, by comparison with my colleague and friend David Held I am a unreconstructed hard-line realist. So it goes.

Still, before dismissing Mearsheimer out of hand, we might want to ponder the state of the discourse in the UK, and ask whether a somewhat less robust version of his critique might hit home. We have an image of ourselves as an open, pluralistic discipline, not affected by the kind of gatekeeping that, allegedly, distorts US international relations, and it is indeed true that in the course of the last two decades British IR has been remarkably open to new forms of knowledge. From being the ‘dismal science’ of the twentieth century, which was its status for most of the last 60 years – replacing economics as the discourse that tells people what they cannot do and why things are not going to get any better – IR has now become a kind of Salisbury Plain for social theory, a testing ground where pretty much anything goes. There is, incidentally, a genuine danger in this context that a kind of academic Gresham’s Law will operate and bad scholarship will drive out good and the obscure will come to be valued above the lucid, with highly specialised language valued for its own sake, rather than tolerated as a necessary evil. As always, it is important that we all keep our bullshit-detectors on line.

But, closing in on Mearsheimer’s point, I wonder if there may not be a kernel of truth in the proposition that, in opening ourselves up to the world of social theory widely defined, we have, of late, somewhat neglected the basics. We certainly are not all ‘idealists’ but it is indeed true that there is a lot less good work on military power going on than there used to be. It made good sense for many students of the ‘art of force’ to redefine themselves as engaged in ‘security studies’ in the 1990s, redesignating the referent object of security in the process, and the profession as a whole has gained thereby. Still, there was a sense, I think, in which the 1990s could be described as a kind of ‘holiday from history’ during which the wisdom of focusing on ‘New Wars’ rather than old, and conjuring up new meanings of security was more or less taken for granted; but, while the absence of an existential threat to the West opened up a space for creative thinking that was very valuable, and in many cases put to good use, it did go some way towards creating a mind-set that has not been much help in the tougher, harsher world post-9/11. I find it rather depressing that, in trying to understand this world, mainstream ‘security studies’ characters do not seem to have much to offer; nor, I readily concede, do IR theorists – the people who have influenced me have been maverick strategists like Christopher Coker and Philip Bobbitt, essayists such as Roberts Kagan and Cooper and Christopher Hitchens, historians such as Walter Russell Mead and Naill Ferguson, and, in a very different vein, political thinkers such as Ben Barber and even, much though I disagree with his position, Noam Chomsky.

The point about this eclectic group is that they have all engaged directly with the issue of violence and its role in contemporary IR in a way that many members of our profession have not, at least not recently. Once upon a time, violence and war

were at the heart of what our discipline claimed to understand; in recent years we have widened our own remit quite dramatically, and, for the most part, all to the good – but I do not think it is too fanciful to suggest that in the process we have lost contact with a central feature of the social world which really does need to be studied systematically and with an historically informed imagination. In short, I do not believe British IR ought to be too worried by Mearsheimer's picture of an idealist-dominated discipline, but I do think we might reflect more seriously on the proposition that by re-focusing our discipline away from the role of force and violence in the world we may have done ourselves, and the wider world, a certain disservice.

Offensive realists, tolerant realists and real realists

Ken Booth, BISA Chair 1995–6

John Mearsheimer is an 'offensive realist'. He believes that the structure of international anarchy, allied to the irreducible uncertainty it creates about the intentions of other states, rationally demands a constant search for advantage, and hence an endless round of inter-state conflict. His theory is set out with numerous historical and contemporary illustrations in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*,²⁶ as well as in earlier publications. The academic followers of this bleak theory are few in number in Western universities, including the United States itself. Professor Mearsheimer is without doubt a 'realist' by conventional designation, but he holds a theory rejected by most other realists. He who lectures by the label, also risks marginalisation by the label.

During his long career, Professor Mearsheimer has made an outstanding contribution to the study of international affairs, but in this lecture his pertinent points are lost as a result of capricious labelling. His 'idealist' category is so broad as to be meaningless, and his understanding of the historical context of some of idealism's supposed schools of thought is insecure. I will leave to aficionados of the English School the contestable characterisation of details of the British Committee; instead I want to challenge his label 'post-Cold War idealism'. The rhetorical move here is to tar a certain body of thought with the same brush of unwisdom and unrealism that supposedly characterised 'post-First World War idealism'; the label also implies that post-war (any war) idealism is merely a fashion, an epiphenomenon of peace. History is more complex. The actual roots of several interesting strands of contemporary thinking about world politics (concerning global civil society, democracy, military confidence-building, critical security studies, etc.) lie not in some naïve post-Cold War optimism, but rather in the theory and practice of 'alternative defence' in Europe dating from the late 1970s. The context for the growth of these ideas was not the end of the Cold War, but living in the shadow of the Central Front *during* the Cold War, minutes from nuclear annihilation; these ideas were germinated in fearful reality, not rose-tinted peace.

The patchwork of individuals and schools comprising John Mearsheimer's 'idealists' have their differences, he notes, but they share more similarities. I disagree. They (we?) have different opinions about the meaning of security, the significance of military power, and the role of discourse. However, I know of nobody who thinks that security has 'little if anything to do with military threats'. Individuals may want to think about military threats in different ways from offensive (and defensive) realists, and they may not want to study military strategy themselves, but I cannot think of any serious scholar for whom political violence is not a matter of concern. There is another important area of shared opinion. When it comes to explaining human behaviour, few subscribe to the extremes of 'vulgar materialism' or 'ideas *all* the way down'. Beyond that is dispute. But wherever one might situate oneself on the ideational/material spectrum, most analysts recognise, in a way that escapes Professor Mearsheimer, that definitions are not 'just definitions'. Security is not just a word, it is a claim on politics. To assert that something is a security issue is to attempt to place it at the top of the national agenda, and demand the mobilisation of state energy and money. This is not the case when one categorises an activity as, for example, a 'hobby'. What is more, whether or not particular governments choose to place certain issues on the security agenda (such as human rights and poverty) they are life-and-death issues for real people in real places across the world. Who would deny them prominence on any political agenda? If they are denied prominence, why? Why should the threat or use of military force have an exclusive claim on the concept of 'security', when the threat or use of tyrannical oppression is so life-threatening? Whose interests are served by denying empirical life and death security threats to countless humans?

The problem (for some realists) with the idea of broadening the security agenda is that it complicates the ontology and praxis of what they would like to be an elegantly sparse theory of international politics. Unfortunately for them, however, the flesh and blood of world politics consistently mock the simplifications of the ideology of realism. The attempt of ideologues to deny complexity has been evident in their objections to challenges to their iconography. This pre-eminently includes saving Professor Carr for realism, an aim which was central to John Mearsheimer's lecture. In order to support his main argument, he is forced to protest Carr's realist credentials, and he does so by concentrating on *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. Leaving aside other problems arising from this debating gambit, there are good reasons for seeing Carr's classic book as more complex than its realist reputation.²⁷ Carr stood in the camps of both utopianism and realism. What is now remembered in realist iconography is his logical dissection of utopianism, and the view that utopia and reality are irreconcilable. But, in some places in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Carr is more guarded about the relationship between utopia and reality; he criticises realism strongly; and he makes positive comments about utopianism. Indeed, Carr defines political science as 'the science not only of what is, but of what ought to be'.²⁸ This definition places normative concerns at the heart of his project, together with trying to understand the world, yet John Mearsheimer criticises so-called idealists for having a 'normative' enterprise while praising the creator of this

definition for being a true realist. Perhaps Professor Mearsheimer does really believe that definitions are 'just definitions', but I cannot accept him as a subscriber to the poststructuralist call for the 'death of the author'; I prefer to give Carr authority over his definition, and consider this another case where realist ideology seeks to maintain its own authority by avoiding the evidence.

Hans J. Morgenthau is another realist icon who was too complex for his disciples, and this might be why he has been rather ignored in recent decades. Certainly, Morgenthau had an essentialist view of human nature and he believed the balance of power to be a universal social phenomenon: so far, so realist. But Morgenthau also came to argue that the nation-state is obsolete, that a world-state is the only rational polity, that nuclear disarmament is desirable, and that community should form the basis for a new world politics. Furthermore, for an iconic theorist of 'the national interest', Morgenthau became a notable advocate on behalf of David Mitrany's functionalist approach to international politics. So was Morgenthau a realist or an idealist? Was he a real realist when his work sought to encapsulate the timeless principles of politics among nations, or did he become a real realist only when he analysed the revolutionary dynamics of the mid-twentieth century and advocated radical world reform (so presumably becoming a Mearsheimerian idealist)? In short: when was 'Morgenthau'?

Realism is a disputatious and dysfunctional family of ideas. Professor Mearsheimer might disagree, not least because he thinks it a tolerant tribe, favouring pluralism. This is a new one on me. I well recall the marginalising of non-orthodox views by the realist hegemony in the Cold War. In the disciplined curricula of those days, there was little or no space for the ideas of Kant, Falk, Boulding, Galtung and others with important things to say about the world; and whole bodies of work done by Marxists, peace researchers or non-Western scholars were ignored or dismissed. Realists criticised non-orthodox opinion for bringing politics or 'preaching' into the seminar room, while they themselves purported to offer objectivity (while actually – without realising it – smuggling in the assumptions of nationalism, the interests of the powerful and the biases of ethnocentrism). Tokenism was sometimes practised, but that is not the same as true pluralism. The latter still remains in short supply, and perhaps nowhere more so than in the United States. Stories of academic gatekeeping do the rounds, and a blanket could be thrown over the theoretical positions of the contributors to the major US-based 'IR' journals; this is why, for the most part, scholars from Europe and elsewhere rarely bother to submit articles.

In John Mearsheimer himself, happily, there is at least one tolerant realist, and I wholly welcome his strictures against a hegemonic discipline. I applaud his words in this regard not because I believe that out of pluralism can come some grand theoretical synthesis that will save the world, but because pluralism should help to keep everybody honest, theoretically speaking. If we talk only within our own tribes, we sponsor groupthink, and everybody knows the dangers of that. Scholarship is better served by healthy struggle (even battles) rather than a dialogue of the deaf.

World politics at the start of the twenty-first century is plagued not only by traditional inter-state conflicts, but by nuclear-armed regional confrontations, ever more dangerous terrorist strategies, new problems arising from globalisation, the challenges of inflamed religiosity, ideological fundamentalism, the politics of rage provoked by obscene disparities of wealth and opportunity and the problems of global environmental change. Insecurity is in season, and it is multilevel and multidirectional. In this context, our energies should not be focused on replaying ancient (largely Anglo-American) battles between so-called realists and so-called idealists, but in confronting the fundamental question of our time for students of world politics: who are the real realists?

Heikki Patomaki and Colin Wight were right when they recently argued that what is at stake between contending theories of international relations today is 'not whether one should be a realist, but of what kind'.²⁹ The real is out there, but it is understood in different ways. They went on: 'for positivists, sense-experience is real; for postpositivists, discourses or intersubjectivity is real'. Positivism/postpositivism do not exhaust the ontological and epistemological possibilities of their argument, but their point is clear. In shifting the debate to the heart of what it might mean to be a real realist (offering answers to the key questions: what is real? what can we know? and what should we do?) I suppose I am engaging in the strategy John Mearsheimer warned about when he said (note 33) that he would not be surprised if Britain's 'idealists eventually put their gun-sights on the concept of realism and attempted to broaden and deepen its meaning'. This warning is much too late! This is an old project for some of us, and one rallying cry was given by the distinguished realist scholar of the history of international relations, W.T.R. Fox, in the very first E.H. Carr Memorial Lecture. In order to make realism more sophisticated, and a better guide to policy in dangerous times, Fox in the early 1980s advocated a theory of change in realism, something Professor Mearsheimer's theory must resist.³⁰

In this first truly global age we need to know who are the real realists. For all those who want to engage with a world that is not working for countless millions of people, the problem of power must remain central. John Mearsheimer criticises those he categorises as idealists for neglecting the role of power. Perhaps some do, though whether their guru is Gramsci, Horkheimer, Foucault, Galtung or Enloe it is difficult to think of contemporary schools of thought about world politics where power is neglected. The study of military strategy might not be central but, as was argued earlier, that is a different matter. Military capabilities are only one dimension of power, and the main challenge for students of international relations is to understand power in all its complexity, and not sacrifice sophisticated understanding for theoretical elegance. I for one do not want to have anything to do with any approach to international politics that does not engage with the great issues of peace and war, but nor do I want to be constrained by simplistic notions of power. Stalin once supposedly asked: 'How many divisions has the Pope?' (implying that without military force the Pope was powerless). In the great Soviet war against Hitler, military might threw back Nazi tanks. In turn, Soviet tanks were sent home

by more complex (and non-military) expressions of power. The last laugh in Eastern Europe was with the Pope. The only truth about power is that it is everywhere and is multifaceted.

A real realist, I contend, must understand that power works in many and complex ways; must dare to know that prevailing institutions in world politics are the problem not the solution; must question the false ‘necessities’ that serve the interests of the contingently powerful and demand the politics and economics of business as usual; must promote world order values in an over-heating and over-populated world; must challenge the agendas and priorities of leaders whose horizons extend only to the next election; and must open up margins for creating a world system to which all realists, operating behind ‘the veil of ignorance’,³¹ could subscribe, regardless of their own place within it.

We – *the global we* – are at a crossroads of history, facing unique combinations of dangers. We need real realists to help us survive *the new twenty years’ crisis*. We will not find them among the problem-solving, dismal-comforting realists Professor Mearsheimer would like to foist upon British academe.

The more isms the better

John Mearsheimer

I appreciate the thoughtful comments about my Carr Lecture from such a distinguished group of scholars. They actually make many points with which I agree. My response, however, will focus on the points of dispute between us. Let me begin by briefly restating the main points in my talk, and then answer my interlocutors’ main charges.

The core theme of my lecture was that the E.H. Carr of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* was a realist and that the two main themes in that seminal book are relevant today. First, states remain the principal actors in the international system and their leaders still care deeply about the balance of power. Second, British academia is dominated by idealists who pay little attention to power. Indeed, there is no realist theorist in contemporary Britain.

Why is this so? I argued in my lecture that today’s idealists are especially hostile toward realism because they believe that discourse is the key vehicle for changing how states interact with each other and thus creating a more peaceful world. Realism, with all its rhetoric about security competition and conflict, is fundamentally at odds with that enterprise, and thus must be marginalised if not eliminated from universities.

Although I am a realist and not an idealist, I did not argue that realism is superior to idealism, much less that idealist theories are bankrupt and should be run out of the academy. Instead, I argued that realism has a lot to say about how the world works and that it would make eminently good sense to have both idealists and realists in British universities and for them to engage in sustained intellectual

combat. In short, I was making the case for intellectual pluralism, while criticising idealists for being hegemonic.

The first major charge levelled against me is that I am guilty of ‘capricious labelling’. For starters, Carr might not be a realist and may even be an idealist. More importantly, there are lots of realists in Britain today, so the main problem that I identify does not exist. Finally, I describe ‘British international relations as a discipline dominated by a single mind-set’, when, in fact, it is ‘complex and multi-faceted’ and there is ‘growing diversity’.

Obviously, labelling scholars can be a tricky business. Nevertheless, I stand by my application of the idealist and realist labels. The Carr of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* has been recognised as a realist by countless scholars over the past 65 years. Carr himself, as I pointed out in a footnote to my lecture, talked about being ‘a bit ashamed of the harsh realism’ of that book.

Ken Booth suggests that even Hans Morgenthau might have been an idealist rather than a realist. But this too fails the common-sense test. Morgenthau self-identified as a realist and *Politics Among Nations* has been considered a realist tract by almost every international relations student since its publication in 1948. It is hard to believe that Carr and Morgenthau have been so completely misunderstood by so many smart people over such a long period of time.

None of this is to deny that Carr and Morgenthau wrote certain books that advanced arguments which were at odds with realism. They did. It is hard to write thousands of pages over a lengthy career without making some arguments that fall within rival theoretical traditions. But *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* and *Politics Among Nations* are seminal realist works and I made it clear in my lecture that I was defining Carr as a realist on the basis of his arguments in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*.

I might also add that the fact that Carr and Morgenthau pay attention to norms and ideals in their famous books is not evidence that they were not realists. Virtually all realists – me included – recognise that state leaders care about more than just the balance of power. Sometimes those leaders have powerful normative concerns, which is why Carr paid serious attention to ‘utopia’ as well as ‘reality’. The key point, however, is that realists believe that power considerations trump all others in the crunch. Carr is no exception in this regard, which is why he is widely – and correctly – seen as a realist.

Regarding my claim that there are no realists in Albion today, I asked many people before I spoke at Aberystwyth whether that was true. I understood full well that I would end up with egg on my face if I was wrong. A few names came up in those discussions, but invariably it was agreed that the person in question was not a realist theorist in any meaningful way. Chris Brown mentions three names in his response: Christopher Coker, Lawrence Freedman and Colin Gray. I know all three of them personally and I know much of their written work. They are all fine scholars, but only Gray comes close to being a realist, and I would not put him in that box.

After my lecture at Aberystwyth, I spoke with many students and professors about the talk, and I do not recall anyone saying to me that there are important

realist thinkers in Britain, and thus the talk was based on an erroneous assumption. Again, I was looking for someone to make that case. Thus, I am puzzled by Chris Brown's claim that, 'the number of people who could lay some claim to being a realist on some not wholly implausible definition of the term is quite substantial'. He even includes himself in the realist camp, which I find especially puzzling, since I was quite certain that he was a staunch anti-realist.

There is an obvious explanation for this newfound inclination of idealists to call themselves realists. When the Cold War ended, it was widely believed on both sides of the Atlantic that we had reached 'the end of history' and that realism was doomed. That perspective held sway throughout the 1990s, but it changed radically after 9/11, as both Chris Brown and Chris Hill make clear in their responses. 'The watershed of 9/11', Hill writes, 'can be seen as having brought about the "return of realism"'. And many more commentators are now willing to conclude the importance of organised violence and other forms of political conflict, after a decade or more of economic optimism.'

In essence, it is no longer possible for idealists to dismiss realism out of hand, as they did in the 1990s. Power and the role of military force obviously still matter in the real world and therefore they must matter for students of international politics. The response of some idealists to this problem – and it is a problem for them – is to re-define themselves as realists, and to claim, as Ken Booth does, that they are the 'real realists' and longstanding realists like me are 'unreal' realists. It is not clear what these terms mean, but the important point for the idealists is that they can now claim the mantle of realism for themselves and thus appear to be in tune with the world around them.

One also sees the manipulation of language at play in Ken Booth's discussion of the concept of power, which realists have long privileged, and which realists like Carr and me accuse idealists of ignoring. He says that 'it is difficult to think of contemporary schools of thought about world politics where power is neglected'. He mentions Gramsci and Foucault among others to support his point. Their basic understanding of power, however, is fundamentally different from how realists understand that concept. Realists focus mainly on material power, be it economic or military, and they claim that idealists ignore that particular kind of power. Gramsci and Foucault, on the other hand, focus mainly on the power of ideas. Rightly or wrongly, those two great thinkers do not care about the balance of military or economic power; nor do British idealists. Thus, my claim that post-Cold War British idealists ignore power is correct.

I might add that Chris Brown effectively says in the latter half of his response that British scholars in the 1990s largely neglected subjects like military power, the role of force, violence and war. To his credit, he acknowledges that 'we may have done ourselves, and the wider world, a certain disservice'.

What about the claim that I failed to capture the diversity among today's British international relations scholars? To be sure, when classifying scholars as idealists or realists, one inevitably downplays the rich diversity among different scholars within those broad categories. I acknowledged that problem with 'lumping' in my

lecture and tried to make clear that I recognise that British idealists are 'a heterogeneous and lively group of thinkers'. My main point, however, was that there are no realist theorists in Britain. To have true diversity, it is essential to have realists as well as idealists, and the former are missing in the land of Carr.

The second major criticism of my lecture is that the clash between idealism and realism is an old and unhelpful debate and not worth revisiting. I focused on that particular divide because I was giving a lecture about the continuing relevance of E.H. Carr, and it sits at the centre of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. I certainly agree that it is an old debate, but it is still a useful one, even though contemporary idealists and realists think about the world somewhat differently than idealists and realists did in Carr's day. And, as noted above, one must be aware of the dangers of lumping idealists and realists into separate boxes and treating them as homogeneous lots. Still, those two tribes look at the world in very different ways and it makes good sense to describe and analyse the differences and similarities between them.

Richard Little points out that there have been subsequent 'great debates' among international relations scholars. Those debates too are now old, and it is commonplace to hear scholars say that it is time to relegate them to the history books. I disagree, and note that Little has found on three separate occasions that it makes eminently good sense to organise the introductory reader that he edits around the fault lines in those debates. More importantly for the discussion at hand, I think that there is considerable overlap between the different camps in those subsequent debates and the rival camps in the first great debate between idealists and realists. In short, there is little chance that the dichotomy between idealists and realists will disappear anytime soon and that is good news.

The third major charge is the claim that realists are intolerant. Ken Booth points out that during the Cold War realists were close-minded gatekeepers who made sure that there was little space for idealists and other non-realists. Chris Hill argues that realists like me 'feel threatened' because idealism has 'started to make insidious inroads into the US academy'.

I had little experience with international relations theorists before 1975, so I cannot comment on how tolerant realists were during the first 30 years of the Cold War. But virtually all of the realists that I have known over the past 30 years have been open-minded regarding alternative perspectives. No realist I know would want to be surrounded with just other realists. Indeed, I think that all of them would welcome being in a diverse department and more generally a diverse discipline. I do not think any of them would view the hiring of idealists as an 'insidious' development, unless, of course, it was part of a scheme to deny realists a place at the table.

Also, if the Cold War realists were as intolerant as Ken Booth claims, how is it that Britain ended up as a realist-free zone by the end of that conflict? They must have been highly incompetent gatekeepers to allow their adversaries to decisively defeat them. If anything, it seems clear, given the absence of realist theorists in the British academy, that the idealists have been especially intolerant of their old rivals, not the other way around. How else can one explain this remarkable situation? The

last sentence of Booth's response offers a flash of this intolerance and sadly shows that there is not much hope for a realist rebirth in Britain. He writes, 'We need real realists to help us survive *the new twenty years' crisis*. We will not find them among the problem-solving, dismal-comforting realists Professor Mearsheimer would like to foist upon British academe.'

The fourth major criticism is Chris Hill's suggestion that my lecture is an academic version of Robert Kagan's well-known claim that Europeans, facing decline, have eschewed power politics and embraced international institutions and other cooperative means of dealing with their problems. Americans, on the other hand, recognise that we still live in a Hobbesian world and that it is sometimes essential to solve problems with military force. In short, Americans are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus.

I certainly had no intention of making Kagan's argument or anything like it. In fact, I do not agree with his claim that modern European states are pacific. Britain, for example, has fought with the United States in all five of America's wars since the Cold War ended. Italy, Spain and Poland willingly joined with Britain and the United States to attack Iraq in March 2003. And the French made it clear that they too would fight in Iraq if the inspections process broke down. So much for the claim that European states are not inclined to unsheathe the sword anymore.

Furthermore, I was not making comparisons between the study of international politics in Britain and the United States. I certainly did not claim that American international relations theorists are fundamentally different than British theorists, much less that the former are superior to the latter. Instead, I focused exclusively on Britain and simply asked whether the arguments that Carr put forth in 1939 are relevant today. Thus, my lecture bears little resemblance to Kagan's thinking about American and European foreign policy.

The fifth and final criticism is articulated by Paul Rogers, who essentially equates realism with neo-conservatism and the Bush Administration's misguided foreign policy after 9/11. He maintains that 'the impact of 9/11 was certainly to embed the realist discourse in the US body politic, with a vigorous and global military response'. Invading Iraq, of course, was a key part of that response, and thus can be seen as a realist war.

This charge is wrong. Neo-conservatives and realists have fundamentally different views about how the world works and what American foreign policy should look like. Before 9/11, the Bush Administration was widely seen to be pursuing a realist foreign policy; most neo-conservatives in and around the Administration initially thought that they would have little influence on American policy under Bush. That situation was reversed after 9/11; the neo-conservatives moved into the driver's seat and the realists in the Administration either adopted a neo-conservative worldview or were marginalised.

On Iraq, virtually every realist, save for Henry Kissinger, opposed that war, just as every important realist, save for Kissinger, opposed the Vietnam War in the early 1960s. Chris Hill has it right when he says, 'US academic realists . . . have had to put up with the destructive idealism of their governments, over the Chinese

revolution, Vietnam and now Iraq.’ I might add that many American idealists, like Michael Ignatieff (Harvard) and Anne-Marie Slaughter (Princeton), strongly supported invading Iraq. The realists knew better.

Let me conclude by repeating a sentence from Ken Booth’s response that I especially like. He wrote, ‘Scholarship is better served by healthy struggle (even battles) rather than a dialogue of the deaf.’ That was the main point I tried to drive home in my Carr Lecture. Hegemonic discourse is antithetical to the scholarly enterprise. Conflict and disagreement are what fuel scholarly progress. Thus, the longstanding battle between idealists and realists is good for our discipline and it should be encouraged. But that insight leads to an obvious conclusion: British universities must house realists as well as idealists.

Notes

- 1 Charles Krauthammer, ‘The Bush Doctrine: ABM, Kyoto and the New American Unilateralism’, *Weekly Standard*, 4 June 2001.
- 2 *The Military Balance, 2004–2005* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2004).
- 3 See Richard K. Ashley, ‘Political Realism and Human Interests’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 25(1), 1981, pp.204–36.
- 4 Richard Little and Michael Smith, *Perspectives on World Politics*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2005).
- 5 Ole Wæver, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Inter-paradigm Debate’, in Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds), *Postpositivism and After* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 6 The second great debate was between behaviouralists and advocates of a classical approach. It was initiated by Hedley Bull. See, ‘International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach’, in Klaus Knorr and James N. Rosenau (eds), *Contending Approaches to International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).
- 7 See Stephen M. Walt, ‘International Relations: One World, Many Theories’, *Foreign Policy*, 110, special edition: ‘Frontiers of Knowledge’, Spring 1998, pp.29–46.
- 8 Wendt helps to clarify this assessment, but complicates the issue by demonstrating that there are four different methodological, or sociological (in his terminology), positions. See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 9 See Martin Wight, ‘Western Values in International Relations’, in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds), *Diplomatic Investigations* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967); and Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977). Both argued that the history of the Western state system has been dominated by three traditions of thought that Bull associates with Hobbes, Grotius and Kant.
- 10 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).
- 11 Robert Gilpin, ‘The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism’, in Robert Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- 12 I have attempted to show elsewhere that the English School framework that makes provision for the international system, the international society and world society is all foreshadowed in Morgenthau. See Richard Little, ‘The English School v. American Realism: A Meeting of Minds or Divided by a Common Language?’, *Review of International Studies*, 29(3), 2003, pp.443–60.
- 13 Note, however, that Buzan, in an important attempt to re-orient the English School collapses the distinction between international systems and international societies into inter-state societies. He then opens up the idea of a world society, and distinguishes between inter-human societies and transnational societies.
- 14 Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p.22.
- 15 Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p.55.
- 16 Drawing on the inter-paradigm debate raises similar problems. We have acknowledged this fact by considerably extending the section of the reader that focuses on the nature of perspectives.

- 17 Lawrence Freedman uses this phrase in his review of Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers* in *International Affairs*, 77(1), 2001, pp.174–5
- 18 Robert Kagan, *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003).
- 19 C.A.W. Manning, *The Nature of International Society* (London: G. Bell & Sons for the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1962).
- 20 Robert Kagan, 'Embraceable EU', *Washington Post*, 5 December 2004.
- 21 Plus northern Europe, given the enthusiasm with which Scandinavian and German scholars have taken up the torch for identity politics and constructivism – but the Mediterranean countries, insofar as they do IR at all, still tend towards unreconstructed realism.
- 22 Tim Dunne and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Good International Citizenship: A Third Way for British Foreign Policy', *International Affairs*, 74(4), 1998, pp.847–71.
- 23 Michael Hirsh, 'The Lewis Doctrine', *Prospect*, 107, February 2005, pp.22–7. Professor Christopher Greenwood of the London School of Economics is the eminent international lawyer who was called in to provide a further opinion when the FCO's in-house lawyers were in doubt about the legal justification of the attack on Iraq in 2003.
- 24 'Liberal' would actually be a better term for Mearsheimer to use than 'idealist' in the UK context as well. For the American story see his ISA paper, 'Realism, the Real World and Academia', available at <<http://www.europenet.org/conference2000/papers/Mearsheimer.doc>>.
- 25 Naturally I pointed out that Machiavelli was not a hard-line realist.
- 26 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
- 27 The points below are taken from Ken Booth, 'Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice', *International Affairs*, 67(3), 1991, pp.527–45. An informative bibliographical essay on the debates on Carr is Michael Cox, 'A Guide to the Secondary Literature on E.H. Carr', in E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001; with a new introduction by Michael Cox), pp.lxiv–lxxi.
- 28 E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919–1939. An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1966; 1st edn 1939; 2nd edn 1946), p.5.
- 29 Heikki Patomaki and Colin Wight, 'After Postpositivism? The Promises of Critical Realism', *International Studies Quarterly*, 44(2), 2000, p.218.
- 30 William T.R. Fox, 'E.H. Carr and Political Realism: Vision and Revision', *Review of International Studies*, 11(2), 1985, pp.1–16.
- 31 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp.17–22, 136–42. A realist, undergoing Rawls's thought experiment, would surely play safe in the tribal interest, and so would advocate the maximising of global justice.