



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Editors' introduction

Hout, W.; Lieshout, R.H.

Citation

Hout, W., & Lieshout, R. H. (1992). Editors' introduction. *Acta Politica*, 27: 1992(1), 3-7. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3449971>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3449971>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

© 1992 Uitgeverij Boom, Meppel en Amsterdam

Niets in deze uitgave mag worden verveelvoudigd en/of openbaar gemaakt door middel van druk, fotocopie, microfilm of op welke andere wijze ook zonder voorafgaande schriftelijke toestemming van de uitgever

Editors' Introduction

Wil Hout
Robert H. Lieshout

This special issue of *Acta Politica* contains six articles dealing with theoretical issues in the study of international relations. With the notable exception of Johan K. De Vree, Dutch international relations scholars in the past have tended to publish more on policy-related subjects, than on theoretical matters. This caused Daalder in 1984 to comment, in his authoritative review of the state of the art in Dutch political science, that the study of international relations in the Netherlands was a 'problem area', in which 'detached' and 'scientifically tested' research was in a clear minority. (Daalder 1984, 455-456) The publication of the reader *Internationale betrekkingen in perspectief*, edited by R. B. Soetendorp and A. van Staden, in 1987, was a first indication that the situation had changed for the better. This special issue of *Acta Politica* should bear witness to the fact that, since then, the theoretical approach has gained further momentum among Dutch students of international affairs.

When the editors invited various Dutch scholars to prepare an article for this special issue of *Acta Politica*, they did not intend to present the reader with a comprehensive overview of all the theoretical developments that have taken place in the study of international relations during the last decade. Nor did they aim for a thorough evaluation of the merits and demerits of these developments. Rather, they wished to illustrate which of these in particular have stimulated the upswing in theorizing among Dutch students of international affairs. Accordingly, the editors asked the authors to write an essay about theoretical developments in the study of international relations during the 1980s that the authors themselves deemed important for the future development of the discipline.

During the past ten years, several authors have tried to assess the theoretical diversity in the study of international relations. The most important overviews of the discipline have been presented by Holsti (1985), Light and Groom (1985), Dyer and Mangasarian (1989), and Olson and Groom (1991). Moreover, an interesting debate among international rela-



tions scholars, dealing with theoretical pluralism, has been conducted in the September 1989 issue of the *International Studies Quarterly*.

Olson and Groom (1991) have described the development of the study of international relations in terms of consensus and conflict. In their view, a first period of consensus can be found in the years after the First World War, when the discipline was dominated by 'idealist internationalism'. The demise of the League of Nations destroyed this consensus. A second period of consensus existed for almost two decades after the Second World War, when the realist tradition held sway, and the study of international relations became equated with the study of power politics. The realist perspective analysed the foreign policy of states in the international arena in terms of survival and security.

The dominant position of realism was undermined during the 1960s and 1970s, when scholars started to argue that power politics was not the only phenomenon that mattered in international affairs. Scholars formulating theories of transnationalism and interdependence held that international relations had become less unidimensional, so that the politico-military definition of survival and security could no longer be the only important aspect. On the other hand, radical scholars stressed the influence of the so-called capitalist world system on relations among states. They started to analyse international relations in terms of economic inequality, dependence, and exploitation.

Although several scholars have sketched the theoretical pluralism of the discipline as a 'struggle' for dominance (for instance, Smith 1989), Olson and Groom tend to interpret the present state of affairs in international relations as a renewed 'consensus': "for the moment we, too, do have an element of consensus in that there is general acknowledgement of the existence of three intellectual traditions in approaches to [international relations]." (Olson and Groom 1991, p. 137)

The approaches that Olson and Groom consider to be dominant nowadays, are: realism, the world or global society model, and the dependency/world capitalist system theories. (1991, p. 138) The dominance of these three approaches is reflected in the choice of topics for the articles in this issue, as will be outlined below.

According to Olson and Groom, the future development of the discipline will not benefit from attempts to achieve "conceptual complementarity, or even compromise" among the three dominant approaches. Neither do they expect much from "a bitter intellectual struggle for the survival of the fittest 'paradigm'". Olson and Groom prefer "discussion to define an issue and seek its elucidation" as this reflects "the growing conceptual awareness in the discipline". (1991, p. 316) In our interpreta-

tion, this means that a continuous evaluation of existing and new theories in the study of international relations is required. The object of the assessment is to retain valuable elements of the theories and discard elements that have proven to be untenable.

The first three articles in this issue deal with regimes. The respective authors discuss regimes from different angles, however. *Gerd Junne* criticizes the state-centric perspective and stresses growing interdependence. *Peter van Ham* analyses whether the theory of hegemonic stability can account for the continued existence of regimes. *André Nollkaemper* scrutinizes several theories pretending to explain the effectiveness of international rules. *Wil Hout* examines the dependency/world system approach in relation to its main theoretical competitors. The two final essays of this issue deal with 'realist' topics. *Henk W. Houweling and Jan G. Siccama* analyse different approaches to the escalation to world wars. *Robert H. Lieshout* reviews the game-analytical approach to defensive alliances.

In the first essay in this issue, *Gerd Junne* analyses different variants of regime theory. According to Junne, the political will of governments to accept regimes cannot be isolated from economic relations, in particular economic interpenetration. During the 1980s the interdependence between the capitalist countries increased enormously. Strategic alliances linking European, American and Japanese firms have become very important. Cognitive theories of regimes are seen as helpful tools in explaining why certain views about regimes spread and become 'hegemonic', while others do not. Junne argues that the explanation of regimes requires special attention for the interaction between systemic and national factors.

Peter van Ham discusses the approach to regimes that has become familiar in the so-called theory of hegemonic stability. In this theory, a regime will be created and maintained if there is a *hegemon*, that is, a state which can impose its own rules and wishes upon other states. A serious problem encountered by the theory of hegemonic stability is how to explain the tenacity of regimes in the face of the decline of the hegemon. Van Ham goes into the problems of international regimes caused by the decline of the post-World War Two hegemon, the United States.

In his contribution, *André Nollkaemper* focuses on the effectiveness of international rules. He distinguishes among three competing perspectives on rule-effectiveness, which he calls the structural, institutional and internal approach. It appears that the three approaches share some common problems, regarding conceptualization, the delineation of the explanatory factors and the empirical dimension. From a theoretical point of view, the structural perspective is the most developed one. This

approach is the only one which does not need to be supplemented by additional theoretical assumptions in order to explain the effectiveness of international rules. The two other perspectives might serve to explain phenomena at 'lower', that is, non-systemic, levels of analysis.

Wil Hout tries to answer the question whether or not the dependency/world system theory is progressive as far as the explanation of international relations is concerned. This theory offers a radically different perspective on phenomena such as international inequality and development. In the essay, Hout compares the dependency/world system theory with its main theoretical precursors and competitors. The conclusion of the essay is that the dependency/world system theory solves some theoretical and empirical problems better than do the other theories, but that it nevertheless contains some important anomalies of an empirical and theoretical nature.

Henk W. Houweling and Jan G. Siccama discuss several theoretical approaches that try to explain why some wars in which great powers participate do escalate into global wars, while other wars in which they take part do not. They distinguish three 'functionalist' approaches: Wallerstein's economic hegemony theory, Gilpin's hegemonic stability approach and Modelski's world leadership model. It is argued that all three approaches suffer from some important defects. An alternative model to explain the escalation of great power war to the global level is found in Organski's power transition hypothesis. Houweling and Siccama's findings indicate that power transitions in so-called major power dyads are the systemic precondition of wars. Factors at the national and dyadic level determine, however, which wars escalate into global wars.

In the final contribution to this issue, *Robert H. Lieshout* considers the possible contribution of the theory of non-cooperative games to the analysis of the conditions under which states decide to balance, or to appease a common enemy. Lieshout's main conclusion is, that it is not the classic problem of the 'free rider' that induces states not to cooperate in order to balance a common enemy, even if cooperation would lead to a Pareto-optimal solution. On the contrary, states are induced not to cooperate because of their estimation of the probability that their contribution may be in vain, on the one hand, and because of the consequences of an unsuccessful contribution, on the other.

Bibliography

- Daalder, H., "De Nederlandse politicologie: Een tussenbalans", *Acta Politica* 19, no. 4, October 1984, p. 441-462
- Dyer, H.C., and L. Mangasarian (eds.), *The study of international relations: The state of the art* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989)
- "Exchange on the 'Third Debate'", *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3, September 1989, p. 235-279
- Holsti, K.J., *The dividing discipline: Hegemony and diversity in international theory* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985)
- Light, M., and A.J.R. Groom (eds.), *International relations: A handbook of current theory* (London: Frances Pinter, 1985)
- Olson, W.C., and A.J.R. Groom, *International relations then and now: Origins and trends in interpretation* (London: Harper/Collins, 1991)
- Smith, S., "Paradigm dominance in international relations: The development of international relations as a social science", in: Dyer and Mangasarian (1989), p. 3-27
- Soetendorp, R.B., and A. van Staden (eds.), *Internationale betrekkingen in perspectief* (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1987)