

In the International System and Their Impact on the Strategic Prioritization of States: A Study of the Perspectives of Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer, and Hedley Bull

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of international anarchy on the reshaping of states' strategic priorities by analyzing the relationship between the anarchic nature of the international environment, the structure of the international system, and the limits of states' strategic behavior. It aims to clarify how international anarchy leads states to reorder their strategic priorities, focusing on three main approaches: Kenneth Waltz's conception of anarchy as a structural feature linked to the distribution of capabilities within the international system; John Mearsheimer's conception, which links anarchy to states' maximization of power and their pursuit of hegemony to ensure survival; and Hedley Bull's conception, which holds that shared interests among international units, together with the rules and institutions they generate, contribute to forming an international society capable of regulating interactions and mitigating the effects of anarchy. The study proceeds from the central premise that international anarchy does not produce a single response among all states; rather, each state's response varies according to its position within the international system, the structure of that system, the distribution of power, and the rules that constrain interaction among states. The study concludes that international anarchy does not signify the complete absence of order, but rather the absence of a supreme central authority, alongside international rules and institutions that relatively limit the effects of this anarchy.....

Keywords: Strategic priorities; International anarchy; International system; Distribution of capabilities; International society..

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary international environment is characterized by complexity and uncertainty, resulting from the interplay of political, security, economic, and technological transformations. In the absence of a supreme central authority capable of enforcing international law and regulating state behavior, the state itself becomes the primary and direct actor responsible for safeguarding its security and preserving its interests and status. Consequently, the prioritization of strategic objectives becomes a dynamic process that continuously evolves according to the nature of the international environment, the state's position within the international system, and the degree of threats and opportunities it encounters.

Significance of the Research: The significance of studying international anarchy lies not merely in its prevalence as a defining characteristic of the international system, but also in clarifying the limits of this anarchy and its implications for state behavior. States respond differently to international anarchy and experience varying outcomes as a result. For some states, anarchy may encourage balancing behavior and strategic caution; for others, it may incentivize power maximization and the pursuit of hegemony. Alternatively, it may lead states to pursue cooperation through international rules and institutions.

Research Problem: The study is guided by the following principal question: How do the boundaries of international anarchy, as conceptualized by different theoretical understandings of the international system, influence the manner in which states prioritize their strategic objectives? This overarching question gives rise to several subsidiary questions: What is the concept of the strategic environment? How is anarchy within the international system conceptualized? How do the boundaries of anarchy differ according to the perspectives of Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer, and Hedley Bull? And what are the implications of these differing conceptions for the strategic prioritization of states?

Research Objectives: This study aims to: ⁱ) clarify the concept of the strategic environment and characterize anarchy in the international system; ⁱⁱ) analyze the boundaries of anarchy according to the perspectives of Waltz, Mearsheimer, and Bull; and ⁱⁱⁱ) examine the impact of these differing theoretical conceptions on the strategic prioritization of states.

Research Methodology: The study employs the descriptive-analytical method to examine the concept and characteristics of international anarchy, and the comparative method to assess the three theoretical conceptions of the boundaries of anarchy and their impact on the strategic prioritization of states.

Research Hypothesis: The study proceeds from the central hypothesis that the boundaries of international anarchy vary according to differing theoretical conceptions of the structure of the international system, and that this variation is reflected in the ways states prioritize their strategic objectives. Kenneth Waltz conceives international anarchy as a structural characteristic that imposes constraints upon states, arguing that the distribution of capabilities among states constitutes the most influential factor in determining both the structure of the international system and the behavior of its units. In contrast, John Mearsheimer's perspective portrays anarchy as a rigid realist condition in which states seek to maximize their power to the greatest extent possible in pursuit of hegemony and the preservation of their survival. Hedley Bull, on the other hand, emphasizes the possibility of regulating international anarchy through international rules and institutions. Accordingly, this study seeks to develop a deeper understanding of how international anarchy evolves from a general characteristic of the international system into a significant factor shaping the strategic priorities of states.

Previous Studies: Several studies have addressed various dimensions of the research topic; however, they have generally focused on a single theoretical perspective or on one specific dimension of international anarchy. The study by Hanan Nwe (2020) examined John Mearsheimer's theoretical contributions to the development of realist thought, while Monem Khamis Mukhlef (2014) explored the assumptions and classifications of neorealism. Similarly, the study by Shorouq Mastour (2025) analyzed the role of middle powers within the international system. Although these studies address international anarchy as a broad theoretical framework or from the perspective of a particular scholar, they do not provide a systematic comparative analysis linking different conceptions of the boundaries of anarchy to their implications for the strategic prioritization of states. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by undertaking a comparative examination of the perspectives of Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer, and Hedley Bull within a unified analytical framework, demonstrating how differences in their conceptualizations translate into variations in the strategic priorities adopted by states.

Structure of the Study: The study is divided into two main sections. The first section examines the concept of the strategic environment and the characterization of anarchy within the international system, while the second section analyzes the boundaries of anarchy according to the structure of the international system, based on the perspectives of Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer, and Hedley Bull.

Section One: The Concept of the Strategic Environment and the Characterization of Anarchy in the International System

The strategic environment assumes considerable importance due to the complexity and significant challenges it encompasses. This environment cannot be reduced to a single dimension; rather, it is the product of the interaction of a range of influential factors, extending from geographical, economic, and security considerations to social and cultural dimensions. The distinctive nature of this environment lies in its complexity and multidimensionality, as it simultaneously incorporates relatively stable and enduring components, such as geographical factors, which impose structural constraints upon states, and political, economic, and security variables that constitute the dynamic and evolving aspects of the international system. This interaction between the constant and the variable, as well as between material and ideational elements, creates a condition of uncertainty and lays the foundation for understanding the anarchic nature of the international system.

In light of the foregoing, this section is divided into the following subsections:

First: The concept of the strategic environment.

Second: Anarchy as a prevailing characteristic of the international system.

Third: Interactions under conditions of international anarchy.

First: The Concept of the Strategic Environment

The strategic environment may be defined as the broad framework within which various political, social, economic, security, and ideological dimensions interact on a global scale. It thus reflects the aggregate behavior of individuals, states, corporations, and social groups, in addition to the broader circumstances surrounding these entities. In this context, the strategic environment represents a comprehensive and complex process of interaction, encompassing relationships among states and non-state actors, as well as the foundational structures of international law and political and religious doctrines.

The strategic environment consists of two interconnected dimensions. The first is the **external dimension**, which comprises a range of political, economic, security, social, cultural, and technological variables situated beyond the territorial boundaries of the state. These variables influence the state's conduct within the international system by generating opportunities that may be utilized to advance national interests, as well as threats that require strategic management and response.

The second is the **internal dimension**, which encompasses the political, economic, military, geographical, social, and technological capabilities possessed by the state. These capabilities determine the extent to which a state is able to formulate its strategy, allocate its resources effectively, and respond to external developments and transformations^(iv)

Second: Anarchy as a Prevailing Characteristic of the International System

Anarchy in the international system refers to the absence of a supreme central authority possessing the legal capacity to enforce the rules governing state behavior and regulating relations among states within the international environment. As a consequence of this absence, states rely on their sovereignty and capabilities to preserve their security and protect their interests within an environment characterized by uncertainty. However, anarchy does not imply the complete absence or collapse of order, as there exist various norms, legal frameworks, and international organizations that regulate relations among states, although these mechanisms lack the authority to compel states to comply with their decisions^(v)

More importantly, the analysis of international anarchy seeks to clarify its consequences and broader implications. The concept of international anarchy may also be employed to refer to the disruption or absence of certain rules or institutions of international order, either because they have not yet been developed or because they have collapsed. A distinction must therefore be drawn between the absence or breakdown of international order itself and state behavior that disregards or violates the existing order, thereby producing conduct that may be described as "anarchic international behavior." Furthermore, anarchy may be understood as a dysfunction or disruption within the system itself, namely the failure of the system to achieve its fundamental objectives and purposes. In a deeper sense, however, anarchy in international relations signifies that existing behavioral expectations, norms, standards, and authoritative structures have become insufficient, even in circumstances where they continue to be formally observed^(vi)

Third: Interactions under Conditions of International Anarchy: -

Within the anarchic structure of the international system and in the absence of a central global authority, states constitute the principal actors responsible for ensuring their own security and survival within the international order. The distribution of power and capabilities among states plays a decisive role in shaping the structure and orientation of the international system, which, in turn, influences the nature of interactions among states, whether through balancing behavior and alliances or through efforts to enhance power and expand influence. Consequently, concerns over potential threats, combined with states' sensitivity to their relative position and power within the international system, render them subject to a logic of caution and competition, even when opportunities for cooperation exist^(vii)

Having established the concept of international anarchy and outlined its general characteristics, it becomes necessary to examine the manner in which interactions are managed within this anarchic environment*, namely, how the structure of the international system shapes state behavior. In the absence of a central authority capable of enforcing rules or guaranteeing collective security, states find themselves compelled to adopt patterns of behavior that are largely universal and shared. Foremost among these are the

principle of self-help in the pursuit of security, the emergence of the security dilemma resulting from mutual interpretations of the actions of others as potential threats, and the variation in states' relative positions within the international system according to the distribution of power and capabilities among them. In light of the foregoing, three principal elements emerge as essential for understanding interactions within the international system: **self-help, the security dilemma, and the distribution of power within the international system** ^(viii); -

1. The Principle of Self-Help:

The principle of self-help constitutes a logical consequence of the existence of an international system characterized by anarchy. The realist approach maintains that, in the absence of a central authority capable of enforcing binding laws and rules, each state becomes the primary and sole actor responsible for safeguarding its security and pursuing its interests within this anarchic environment. This condition compels states to rely primarily upon their own capabilities, while limiting their trust in, or dependence upon, international cooperation. Accordingly, structural realism posits that states must rely on self-help to protect themselves against threats and safeguard their interests independently, making security and survival the fundamental objectives of their external behavior. This does not imply a rejection of international cooperation; rather, such cooperation must be constructed upon clear conditions that preserve states' interests, given that the international environment lacks a guarantor capable of ensuring the sustainability of cooperative arrangements ^(ix)

2. The Security Dilemma:

The origins of the security dilemma, in its deliberate form, can be traced primarily to the nature of interstate relations, particularly among neighboring states, which are influenced by factors such as geographical proximity, mutual distrust, and the sensitivity of political and security issues. In this context, states' efforts to enhance their security become conscious and deliberate actions. Conversely, the unintended security dilemma arises as a consequence of the anarchic structure of the international system itself. Even when states adopt defensive measures to protect themselves, they remain unable to credibly communicate their intentions to other actors within the international environment. This understanding is consistent with Hedley Bull's distinction between "**intentional balance**" and "**unintentional balance**," whereby the deliberate security dilemma emerges from continuous and sustained interactions among states, whereas the unintended security dilemma arises as a consequence of the anarchic nature of the international system. Consequently, the security dilemma does not manifest uniformly across all states; rather, it varies according to the political and security environment surrounding each state ^(x)

3. The Distribution of Power in an Anarchic International System: -

Proceeding from the premise of the anarchic nature of the international system necessitates a focus on the concept of power as a central variable for understanding state behavior and interactions in international relations. Accordingly, states within the international system may be categorized into three principal groups—**great powers, middle powers, and small powers**—based on their capacity to ensure their survival.

A. Great Powers:

The term *great powers* refers to a limited group of states possessing substantial resources and exercising significant influence within the international system and its interactions. This concept is not confined solely to states endowed with extensive material capabilities; it also encompasses those states that enjoy a recognized and credible status among other members of the international community. Great powers are characterized by advanced military capabilities, influential economic strength, sophisticated technological capacities, substantial human resources, and the ability to project influence and defend their interests and principles within the international environment. ^(xi)

B. Middle Powers:

Middle powers occupy an intermediate position between great powers and small powers. Although they do not possess the military and economic capabilities necessary to qualify as great powers or to assume leadership of the international system, they cannot be regarded as weak or insignificant states. Rather, they possess moderate military, economic, and demographic capabilities that enable them to exert a degree of influence in international affairs, often through the cultivation of diplomatic roles based on mediation and international cooperation. Recognition by other states further enhances their position within the international

system. In light of the foregoing, middle powers play an important role in promoting stability within the international environment and in facilitating gradual and indirect changes in the structure of the international system. ^(xii)

C. Small Powers:

Small powers constitute sovereign entities that may nonetheless exercise an active and influential role within the international system. Their capabilities are not assessed solely on the basis of population size, territorial extent, or economic resources; rather, their significance also depends upon the extent of their influence and presence at both the regional and global levels, achieved through the effective management of their resources, the implementation of their foreign policies, and the formation of strategic alliances. ^(xiii)

Section Two: The Boundaries of Anarchy According to the Structure of the International System: -

The rapid transformations within the international system have prompted a reconsideration of the nature and boundaries of anarchy. International anarchy is founded upon the absence of a supreme authority capable of imposing binding rules, compelling states to rely on their own capabilities to ensure their survival while continuing to operate under conditions of uncertainty regarding the intentions of others. Consequently, theorists have developed divergent interpretations concerning the boundaries of anarchy and the extent of its influence on state behavior. Some have interpreted it through the logic of power and the struggle for hegemony and survival within an anarchic international system; others have viewed it as a structural characteristic that imposes constraints upon international actors; while a third perspective has conceptualized it as a form of constrained anarchy regulated by a set of rules and norms governing interactions among states. Therefore, understanding the boundaries of anarchy requires an examination of the principal theoretical approaches that have addressed the structure of the international system and its implications for the prioritization of states' strategic objectives.

In light of the foregoing, this section is divided into the following subsections:

First: Anarchy in the international system according to Kenneth Waltz's perspective.

Second: Anarchy in the international system according to John Mearsheimer's perspective.

Third: Anarchy in the international system according to Hedley Bull's perspective.

First: Anarchy in the International System According to Kenneth Waltz's Perspective: -

The notion of the absence of a supreme authority within the international system is not a novel concept in realist thought, as it had already been acknowledged by classical realists. However, Kenneth Waltz reformulated this concept within a more systematic and scientific framework through his theory of **neorealism**, or **structural realism**, in which anarchy serves as the fundamental basis for explaining state behavior and interactions within the international system. ^(xiv) Waltz conceptualizes the international system through three principal questions: how the units within the system are arranged, how their functions are differentiated, and how capabilities are distributed among them. Through these questions, Waltz identifies the structural components of the international system and demonstrates that an understanding of state behavior cannot be separated from the nature of the structural environment within which states operate. ^(xv)

1. Anarchy as a Structural Characteristic of the International System: -

Kenneth Waltz argues that anarchy constitutes a fundamental characteristic of the structure of the international system. However, this anarchy does not imply the complete absence of order; rather, it refers to the absence of a supreme central authority capable of regulating and governing relations among states. This stands in contrast to the domestic sphere, which is characterized by a hierarchical structure based on relations of command and obedience. Within the international environment, there exists no authority with the legitimate power to issue commands or enforce compliance; instead, relations among states are based on interaction and cooperation among sovereign units. Consequently, the international system is not organized around a central authority. Nevertheless, the absence of authority does not equate to the absence of order, as a form of order may emerge through the interactions of international actors themselves. States, according to Waltz, are functionally similar units but differ in terms of their capabilities and power, making the distribution of capabilities the primary determinant of the structure of the international system. ^(xvi)

2. The Distribution of Capabilities, the Balance of Power, and Their Impact on the Structure of the International System: -

Waltz maintains that the structure of the international system cannot be determined by reference to a

single dimension of power. Rather, it must be understood through an assessment of the aggregate capabilities possessed by the major powers. Isolating individual dimensions of power from one another renders the analysis of the international system's structure more difficult and complex. Accordingly, the number of major powers possessing comprehensive and influential capabilities determines the number of poles within the international system.

From this perspective, the structure of the international system is determined by the distribution of capabilities, which serves as the framework defining the boundaries of competition, the degree of stability, and the prospects for cooperation within the international order. In the absence of a supreme central authority, states are compelled to rely upon their own capabilities to ensure their existence, guarantee their survival, and preserve their position through balancing against other powers, mobilizing their resources, and forming balancing alliances with other states. This dynamic produces a persistent condition of security competition without entirely eliminating the possibility of cooperation. ^(xvii)

Waltz further argues that state behavior and strategic choices are not determined solely by domestic preferences or internal decision-making processes; rather, they are shaped primarily by the nature of the international system itself and the constraints it imposes upon states. The structure of the system also determines the extent of power that states can acquire or exercise, thereby preventing them from acting with complete freedom. From this perspective, Waltz contends that states cannot pursue unlimited power indefinitely, as any attempt to exceed an acceptable level of power will provoke responses from other states, either through balancing behavior or through the formation of countervailing alliances ^(xviii)

3. The Boundaries of Anarchy and Their Implications for the Prioritization of Strategic Objectives:-

Based on the foregoing, Kenneth Waltz argues that, because the international system lacks a supreme authority responsible for protecting all states, each state is compelled to place survival and security at the forefront of its strategic priorities. However, this condition does not produce a uniform pattern of response among all states within the international system, since states do not possess identical capabilities, levels of power, or degrees of influence, nor do they occupy equivalent positions within the international order. Consequently, their patterns of response vary. Accordingly, the structure of the international system affects not only relations among states but also the manner in which states prioritize their strategic objectives ^(xix)

Waltz further maintains that, within an anarchic international system, states cannot formulate their strategic priorities solely on the basis of present circumstances; rather, they must take into account potential future developments that may affect their position within the balance of power—a phenomenon often referred to as the “**shadow of the future.**” Consequently, preserving the existing balance of power, or preventing its disruption, may become a strategic priority even before a tangible threat materializes. States may therefore act out of concern that conditions which appear acceptable in the present could evolve into significantly more adverse circumstances in the future. Waltz also argues that intensifying competition among states compels them not merely to pursue gains, but to redefine the very meaning of such gains. Under conditions of intense competition, states no longer assess success solely in terms of the benefits they obtain, but rather in terms of the extent to which those benefits enhance their position within the structure of the international system. ^(xx)

Second: Anarchy in the International System According to John Mearsheimer's Perspective: -

John Mearsheimer contends that his theory represents a development of Waltz's defensive realism by moving beyond what he describes as a bias toward the status quo. In an anarchic international environment, where states possess the capability to inflict harm upon one another and where uncertainty remains a defining characteristic of international relations, states can never be certain of the intentions of others. This condition compels them to adopt offensive strategies in order to ensure their survival. Mearsheimer's theory is founded upon several fundamental assumptions, including the following:

1. The Foundations of Anarchy in the International System: -

John Mearsheimer's theory, which seeks to explain the behavior of great powers, their persistent competition for power, and their pursuit of hegemony, is based on five core assumptions regarding the international system. These assumptions compel states to behave in a competitive and aggressive manner:

The international system is anarchic because there is no authority above states capable of compelling them to comply with the rules of international law.

Great powers inherently possess a degree of offensive military capability that enables them to inflict

harm upon one another.

States can never be certain of the intentions of other states or whether those states will refrain from using their offensive military capabilities against them.

Survival constitutes the ultimate objective of great powers.

Great powers are rational actors that understand their external environment and formulate strategic plans to ensure their survival within it. ^(xxi)

2. Power Maximization as a Response to Anarchy: -

Mearsheimer argues that the structure of the international system compels states, even when their primary objective is merely to preserve their security, to approach other states through a logic of competition and hostility. This dynamic stems from the convergence of three fundamental characteristics of the international system: (1) the absence of a supreme central authority capable of protecting states from one another; (2) the permanent possession of offensive military capabilities by states; and (3) the impossibility of attaining complete certainty regarding the intentions of other states. Under these conditions, states exist in a persistent state of fear, as they cannot be assured that others will refrain from employing force against them in the future. Consequently, each state recognizes that increasing its power relative to its competitors enhances its prospects for survival. Therefore, the maximization of power becomes a rational strategy within an environment characterized by uncertainty, while the attainment of superiority or hegemony emerges as the most effective means of ensuring security, since a hegemonic state is less likely to face serious threats from others. ^(xxii)

3. The Boundaries of Anarchy and Their Implications for the Prioritization of Strategic Objectives:-

Mearsheimer contends that survival constitutes the primary objective of states and occupies the highest priority in shaping the behavior of great powers within the international system. Nevertheless, states do not confine their actions solely to security-related objectives; they also pursue a range of non-security goals, such as achieving greater economic prosperity, promoting particular ideologies abroad, advancing national unity, or advocating for human rights. Offensive realism acknowledges that states may pursue non-security objectives, but only insofar as such pursuits do not undermine their position within the balance of power or take precedence over the imperative of survival. Indeed, certain non-security objectives may contribute to the enhancement of relative power. Economic prosperity, for example, can serve as a critical foundation for military strength, as wealthier states possess greater capacity to develop and sustain stronger military capabilities, thereby improving their prospects for survival. ^(xxiii)

Third: Anarchy in the International System According to Hedley Bull's Perspective: -

Hedley Bull's approach represents a more moderate perspective, arguing that although conflict remains a persistent feature of international relations, states have developed and institutionalized a set of rules and institutions over time that regulate their behavior and constrain the use of force within the international environment. ^(xxiv)

1. The Concept of International Society: -

Hedley Bull argues that international relations cannot be understood solely as a realm of conflict driven by the pursuit of power and hegemony. Rather, he contends that there exists an international society characterized by a degree of balance of power within which states operate. In this context, power, war, international law, diplomacy, and the balance of power constitute the principal institutions of international society. Furthermore, the absence of a balance of power and the lack of consensus among the great powers weaken the effectiveness of other elements of international order, including shared values, international organizations, and international law, rendering them incapable of sustaining the international system ^(xxv).

Bull adopts a sociological perspective that views states as being motivated not only by self-interest but also by the values, norms, and beliefs that emerge within the international environment. This approach stems from the notion that order in international politics is not based exclusively on the balance of power, but also on the existence of a society of states in which each state preserves its sovereignty while participating in an organized framework of international relations. When this international society is weak, the most that can be achieved is agreement on basic rules of coexistence and survival, such as limiting violence, protecting property, preserving territorial integrity and sovereignty, and honoring agreements among states. Accordingly, the greater the convergence of states' interests, values, and perceptions of belonging to a common society, the more likely it becomes that international rules facilitating broader political, economic,

and social cooperation will develop. From this perspective, the balance of power may be defined as a condition in which no single state is capable of achieving overwhelming superiority and imposing its will upon all others^(xxvi)

2. The Role of International Rules and Institutions in Regulating Anarchy: -

Bull argues that anarchy in the international system is regulated not through a central authority, but through the rules and institutions established by states themselves. Thus, despite the absence of a world government, the existence of an international society is founded upon a shared awareness of fundamental interests. Bull's understanding of international order rests upon two principal dimensions: rules and institutions. This perspective is based on the proposition that the preservation of international order depends, first and foremost, on the existence of a shared recognition among states of common interests that they seek to achieve, after which rules emerge to define the forms of behavior consistent with these objectives^(xxvii)

At the institutional level, Bull identifies the balance of power as one of the five fundamental institutions of international society and regards it as the principal regulatory institution because of its role in creating the conditions necessary for the effective operation of the other institutions upon which international order depends, namely diplomacy, war, international law, and great-power management. According to Bull, these institutions are mutually interdependent in practice. It may therefore be argued that, within Bull's framework, the balance of power functions as the central institution upon which, at least in part, the continued operation of the other four institutions depends^(xxviii)

3. The Boundaries of Anarchy and Their Implications for the Prioritization of Strategic Objectives:-

Building upon the role of rules and institutions, Bull distinguishes between the international system, which arises simply through regular interaction among states, and international society, which emerges when states recognize the existence of shared values, rules, and institutions that regulate their conduct and define the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behavior in their mutual relations^(xxix) Rules subsequently serve to specify the forms of conduct deemed legitimate within this society. These rules may be categorized into three levels: fundamental principles that recognize the state as the primary unit of international society; rules of coexistence that limit the use of force and regulate the obligations of states; and rules of cooperation that facilitate the expansion of political, economic, and social interactions among states.^(xxx)

On this basis, Bull does not regard survival and power maximization as the sole priorities of states. Rather, he argues that the stability of international society depends upon a broader set of fundamental priorities, including the preservation of international society and the state system, the maintenance of state sovereignty and independence, and the preservation of peace as the normal condition that ought to prevail among states. In addition, he identifies a number of primary objectives common to all organized societies, namely the limitation of violence, the observance of commitments, and the maintenance of stable governance^(xxxi)

Accordingly, the prioritization of strategic objectives in Bull's framework is based upon an attempt to reconcile the continued existence of international anarchy, on the one hand, with the necessity of regulating interactions among states through international rules and institutions, on the other.

A Brief Comparison of the Assumptions of Anarchy

Thinker	Core Assumption	Overall Framework	Mechanisms
Kenneth Waltz	Structural Realism (Neorealism)	The anarchic structure of the international system compels states to maintain a balance of power.	Alliance formation and deterrence.
John Mearsheimer	Offensive Realism	International anarchy compels states to pursue regional hegemony as the most reliable means of ensuring their survival.	Aggressive strategies and offensive military capabilities.

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Hedley Bull	International Society Theory	Despite the absence of a central authority, cooperation among states remains possible through shared norms, rules, and institutions.	International institutions and common rules.
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Source: Table prepared by the researcher based on: Ali Fares Hameed, *Theories of International Strategy Analysis*, Iraqi Institute for Dialogue, 1st ed., 2021, pp. 38–44.

Contemporary Applications of the Three Conceptions: These three conceptions can be readily discerned in contemporary international interactions. Waltz's logic of structural balancing is reflected in policies of power balancing and alliance formation aimed at countering the rise of major powers, as illustrated by the strategic competition between the United States and China and the accompanying regional realignments. Mearsheimer's logic of power maximization and the pursuit of regional hegemony is evident in the offensive behavior of great powers and their determination to prevent the emergence of a peer competitor within their respective spheres of influence. By contrast, Bull's conception of international society is manifested in the role played by international organizations, international law, diplomacy, and the balance of power in regulating interstate interactions and constraining violence despite the enduring anarchic nature of the international system. These examples are intended solely as illustrative applications and would benefit from further substantiation through well-documented case studies.

Here is the refined academic translation, preserving the structure and numbering:

Conclusion

The study of international anarchy demonstrates that the international system does not operate according to a fixed logic or a single predetermined pattern of response, as the absence of a supreme authority does not necessarily imply the complete absence of order. Within this context, states function in an environment characterized by anarchy and uncertainty, where each state bears the primary responsibility for safeguarding its own security, interests, and position within the international system. Consequently, the prioritization of strategic objectives is neither static nor definitive; rather, it evolves in accordance with the nature of the international environment, the structure of the international system, the state's position within it, its relative capabilities, and the threats it confronts.

The scope and consequences of anarchy vary according to the theoretical perspective adopted for its analysis. From Kenneth Waltz's perspective, anarchy is understood as a structural characteristic arising from the distribution of capabilities among states. Accordingly, state behavior is shaped not only by domestic decision-making but also by the state's position within the structure of the international system. The foremost priority of states, therefore, is to preserve their security, prevent imbalances in the distribution of power, and adapt to the constraints imposed by the international environment. In contrast, John Mearsheimer argues that anarchy assumes a more acute form, as the absence of a central authority, combined with states' offensive military capabilities and the inherent uncertainty regarding the intentions of others, compels states to maximize their power and pursue superiority in order to ensure their security and survival. Hedley Bull, however, offers a more moderate interpretation, maintaining that the existence of anarchy does not preclude the possibility of order within the international system. International rules, institutions, and shared interests collectively constitute an international society that provides a degree of stability to international relations and mitigates the disruptive effects of anarchy. These theoretical perspectives thus illustrate that international anarchy may lead states toward adaptation and balancing, power maximization and competition, or the regulation of interstate interactions through international rules and institutions, depending on the nature of the international system and the boundaries of anarchy within it.

Conclusions

International anarchy does not signify the complete absence of order; rather, it denotes the absence of a supreme central authority capable of enforcing binding rules upon states. Nevertheless, international rules and institutions continue to exist and may, to varying degrees, mitigate the effects of anarchy.

The three theoretical approaches demonstrate that anarchy influences state behavior in distinct ways. For Waltz, anarchy encourages states to balance and adapt to the structure of the international system. For Mearsheimer, it drives states to maximize power and pursue superiority as a means of ensuring survival. For Hedley Bull, anarchy remains manageable through international rules, institutions, and shared interests.

The prioritization of states' strategic objectives is directly influenced by their position within the international system and by the distribution of power and capabilities among states. Consequently, states do not respond uniformly to anarchy; rather, their responses vary according to their capabilities, systemic position, the magnitude of the threats they face, and the opportunities available to them....

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2. Hanan Noui, *John J. Mearsheimer's Theoretical Contributions to the Development of the Realist Perspective*, unpublished Master's thesis in Political Science and International Relations, Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'Sila, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Department of Political Science, M'Sila, Algeria, 2020–2021.
3. Mohammed Qasim Hadi Al-Mufraji, *Strategic Planning and Its Impact on American Decision-Making*, unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Strategy, College of Political Science, Al-Nahrain University, 2014.

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1. Ahmed Mohammed Wahban, "Realist Theory and the Analysis of International Politics from Morgenthau to Mearsheimer: An Evaluative Study," *Scientific Journal of the Faculty of Economic Studies and Political Science*, Alexandria University, Alexandria, Egypt, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2016.
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