

International Relations

A Beginner's Guide

Charles Jones



O N E W O R L D

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Abbreviations

BISA	British International Studies Association
BP	British Petroleum (the abbreviated form is now the official title of the firm)
CoW	Correlates of War
DC	Developed country
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
EU	European Union
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas de la Revolución Colombiana
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FIFA	Fédération International de Football Association
G77	Group of 77 (in UNCTAD and similar bodies)
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross domestic product
GNP	Gross national product
HSBC	Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (the abbreviated form is now the official title of the firm)
IFI	International Financial Institution
IGO	Intergovernmental organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IP	International Politics
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPE	International Political Economy
IR	International Relations (the academic field)
ISA	International Studies Association

x Abbreviations

ISI	Import substituting industrialization
LDC	Less developed country
MID	Militarized Interstate Dispute
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NIC	Newly industrializing country
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OAPEC	Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
TNC	Transnational corporation
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN(O)	United Nations (Organization)
UNCLOS	United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US(A)	United States (of America)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)
WISC	World International Studies Committee
WMD	Weapons of mass destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, dollars (\$) are US dollars, 1 billion = 1,000,000,000 (1×10^9) and 1 trillion = 1,000,000,000,000 (1×10^{12}).

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Preface

A bland introduction to any field of study without an argument to engage the attention of the reader would be very dull. This book has two.

The first is that International Relations deserves attention precisely because it is not a discipline marked off from other fields by its subject matter or method; nor is it a sub-discipline of political science. I have taken care to provide a basic outline of the growth of the modern states-system and the world economy, the rise of international organizations of every sort, and some principal tendencies in global society. However, social sciences such as economics or politics that begin by abstracting their subject matter from society as a whole in order to apply a distinctive method run a serious risk of losing in relevance what they gain in elegance. The messier, more eclectic approach of International Relations looks not only to history, economics, politics, and law – its old companions – but beyond them to social anthropology, sociology, and literary and cultural studies. It is perhaps closer in spirit to its purer cousins, contemporary laboratory sciences, where it is commonplace for investigators faced with a new problem to seek new techniques and new kit to tackle it.

The second argument is a call to resist the frequently drawn contrast between political realism and liberal internationalism. This continues to be widely regarded as the principal theoretical division of the field, even though many have challenged it. Realists and liberals are generally said to differ in world view and in their typical policy recommendations. Realists are a pessimistic

bunch, at best doubtful about the prospects for international co-operation and progress. Liberals, by contrast, are generally said to be more optimistic (or credulous). Setting aside these differences in temperament, the division is better thought of as a disagreement about the appropriate scope of study. Realists, often identifying themselves with International *Politics*, opt for a narrow agenda; their critics prefer a broader one.

Anyone who embarks on the study of international relations with a realist view of the world already firmly in place will tend to restrict attention to affairs of state, and be content to privilege political science over other relevant disciplines, if not to regard International Relations as a sub-field of politics. For others, their agendas perhaps set by practical experience in the field, a broader perspective is needed, allowing a more innovative range of possible solutions to global problems such as climate change or slavery. The division between realists and liberals therefore boils down to the question of which is set first, interpretation or agenda. Support for the broad-agenda view often rests on the claim that current levels of cross-border transactions and their impact on the lives of ordinary people are unprecedented. This may be true; but the argument offered here is that the broad view has always been possible, and that the choice between realist emphasis on relations between states and a broader liberal view embracing relations between peoples has as much to do with the selection of evidence as with the extraordinary dynamics of recent decades. Attitudes and agendas can be separated, and the choice of methods of inquiry is a practical matter, not an issue of principle.

History consists of two quite different things. There is what happened in the past, and there are stories about what happened in the past. The only way of approaching the first is through the second. It is much the same with international relations. There is the complex parade of wars, negotiations, commerce, and migration across frontiers; there is also the interpretation of these

events, generally concentrated in universities, business schools, military establishments, and diplomatic academies. The first of these is usually referred to as international relations – plural and lower-case – and the second – singular and with initial capitals – as International Relations, or IR for short. This book provides an introduction to both.

1

What is international relations?

Many people pay little attention to what's going on beyond their own local community. For the poorest, the world over, securing food and shelter dominates their lives. For those with means and leisure, news bulletins and foreign holidays provide windows on the wider world, but the glass can be pretty frosty.

However, year after year more and more people cross national frontiers seeking employment or sanctuary. When they do so, they are responding to the kinds of forces examined in this book, most of all market incentives and organized violence. But Colombian taxi drivers in New York, Somali refugees in London, or North European tourists in Marrakesh have little incentive to move beyond the cultural bubble formed by their compatriots in Queens, Tower Hamlets, or the hotels of the Marrakech *Palmeraie*. Cheap transport, Skype, e-mail, and access to media in other languages make it easier than ever to opt out of integration. This sort of globalization often leads to merely superficial interaction between nations.

So who really cares about international relations? Who wants to know, and why? Who *needs* to know? In the past, this was quite simple. International relations were generally understood as relations between states, conducted through their heads of state, ministries of foreign affairs, diplomatic corps, and armed forces. It followed that international relations were the business of a

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restricted elite of experts, generally from wealthy and powerful families, who embarked on a career in public service with a good general education, learning the crafts of statesmanship, diplomacy, and soldiering on the job. It was also assumed that each state housed one nation, for whom the state could speak with authority. Hence 'inter-*national* relations'.

There is ample reason to doubt the accuracy of this description of world politics. Many states have several distinct nations within their frontiers, keen to assert themselves in the wider world. Many are home to recently arrived communities whose members still identify with their country of origin as much as their new home, and may take an active part in its politics. Some states have a firm administrative grip on the whole of their territory; others control little beyond their seat of government, the remainder being governed by insurgent groups who effectively operate their own foreign policies. Some states maintain tight central control over external relations; others give considerable latitude to several ministries and other agencies to negotiate with their peers. Most are fully independent, but some have effectively lost sovereignty for a time following war or disaster, or else have sub-contracted some of their functions to non-governmental organizations staffed by expatriates. In short, the neat world in which professional diplomats and political leaders had exclusive command of international relations has long gone, if indeed it ever existed. Many others are now involved.

Commerce is also an important factor in international relations. Long-distance trade is as old as civilization itself, and merchants have always had a keen interest in knowing which routes were safest and which markets and commodities most profitable. More recently, cheap transport has made it commonplace to cross national frontiers in search of employment or higher education.

Many religions have spread beyond their country of origin, often following lucrative trade routes or victorious armies.

The faithful cross boundaries for religious instruction, as pilgrims, as missionaries, and to find suitable marriage partners. Religious practice around the world is sometimes enjoined by law, sometimes merely consistent with it, and sometimes at odds with it. The teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on contraception, abortion, and divorce, for example, are not reflected in French legislation any more than are the views of other faith communities on polygamy or the veiling of women. Religious leaders, like traders, have needed to understand and work within the wider world.

When journeys for leisure and business purposes are also considered, cross-frontier travel becomes a significant element in the world economy, estimated at around fourteen percent of world product.

Relations between states are no longer handled solely by heads of government and their foreign ministers. Ministries of commerce, environment, foreign aid, finance, and justice are just a few of those now dealing routinely with one another and with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), more or less independently of their countries' foreign ministries. Very often such dealings are regulated by international agreements and are routinely handled by organizations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.

Heads of government now often deal with urgent and conflictive issues by meeting face to face, a task which would once have been the province of diplomats. In some regions of the world, most notably Europe, relations between states have gone beyond co-operation to something approaching federation. This has required the creation of substantial administrative and political structures, such as the European Commission in Brussels and the parliament in Strasbourg.

Meanwhile, improvements in transport and communications have made it possible for large firms to operate globally.

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Transnational corporations such as Toyota, BP (formerly British Petroleum), HSBC (formerly the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation), or Coca Cola employ hundreds of thousands of people in dozens of countries. Strictly speaking, these firms are international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), but that phrase is more often used to describe not-for-profits such as Greenpeace, Oxfam, or Amnesty International. Finally, the world's armed forces, once exclusively devoted to defence or conquest, are now very often charged with peacekeeping, state-building, and economic development tasks in parts of the world weakened by conflict or threatened by insurgency. Officers are called upon to use political and diplomatic skills as they strive to run hospitals or airports far from home.

Whole nations feel the effects of these cross-border flows. The numbers of migrant workers and the monies they send to their countries of origin (remittances) bear witness to this, as do the residents of the world's semi-permanent refugee camps. Seeking asylum in countries less brutal than their own, refugees often experience hostility or indifference in their host countries.

Together, national politicians and civil servants with international responsibilities, the staff of international governmental organizations, entrepreneurs and managers operating across frontiers, the expatriate staff of NGOs, and the world's officer corps number hundreds of thousands if not millions. As they channel resources from one country to another and engage in humanitarian interventions and post-conflict development programmes, these people conduct international relations and grow to understand them first hand. The best justification for the academic study of international relations, as it has developed over the past century, is its provision, for these practitioners, of a coherent view of the whole complex pattern of political, social, and economic relations within which they act: a gateway into their professions or an opportunity for critical reflection on existing practice.