Unit D 30: Introduction to Political Science

1.   Summary

Scholarly questions about political contexts are inextricably linked to certain fundamental views of international politics, namely the particular "paradigm" - that is, the theory to be applied. Because international political reality is seen and understood in very different ways in this context, this text presents the most important theoretical approaches to the analysis of international politics.

2.   Content and purpose of political science

Political science or political science is - according to Neyer (2013:40) - "at its core democratic science". At the international level, political science is concerned on the one hand with the description and analysis of political processes and political institutions at the most diverse levels, and on the other hand with pragmatics, i.e. questions about optimal action under certain conditions and against the background of current problems. Pelinka/Varwick (2010:18) even speak of three basic directions of political science:

Empirical-analytical political science:
- Empirical, i.e., fact-based in the narrow sense.
- Methods of empirical social research
- Does not ask about political benefit or
interest-driven dependence
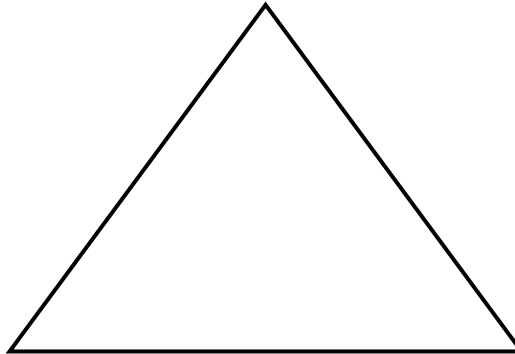
Normative-practical political science
- Exploitability in politics

- benefit orientation
- practical relevance
- adaptable, partly too
  arbitrarily oriented
- "2/3 science": rather
  political service

Critical-dialectical political science
- Politics in the context of society as a
  whole
- crit. distance to power relations
- tendency towards "opposition science"
- fundamental criticism
- little inclination to "possible" or
  "feasible"

Source: Adapted from Pelinka / Varwick2010:18, modified and edited by CJ.

Empirical-analytical political science is interested in facts and figures, in more or less value-neutral contexts. Normative-practical political science aims to optimize political action, i.e. it is a more application-oriented, less critically oriented science. Critical-dialectical political science is concerned with social interdependencies, with a critical analysis of social and political conditions.

These perspectives are also associated with very specific ideas of what is meant by "politics":

Definitions and concepts of politics	
Governmental politics Primarily related to the state; traditional "science of the state"	**Participatory political concept** Mainly related to the individual; but with participatory mechanisms; so to speak "political science without the state".
Normative understanding of politics Value-based, oriented towards a target state	**Descriptive policy concept** Describes political contexts
Conflict-oriented politics Places the connection between politics and conflict(s) at the center	**Consensus-oriented understanding of politics** Interested in balancing and peace function of politics, rather compromise-oriented

Historicizing understanding of politics	Ahistorical notions of politics
Social structures, dependencies and changeability are in the center	Emphasize timeless, superhistorical notions and the immutability of politics

Source: Adapted from Pelinka / Varwick2010:19, modified and supplemented by CJ.

Thus, politics can be understood as securing order and organizing the coexistence of people, as striving for power, as clashes between strategies and worldviews, as leading people and groups, as processes of public opinion formation, as the struggle of social classes or groups to assert their interests, and so on. (cf. Pelina/Varwick 2010:19/20).

Furthermore, political science distinguishes between "polity" as the formal organization of politics in the form of constitution, norms and institutions, "policy" as the orientation towards programmatic-strategic and substantive orientation in politics, and "politics" as processes and procedures for the assertion of interests (cf. Pelinka/Varwick 2010:21).

2.1   Questions in political science

With regard to international politics, Frank Schimmelfennig (2013:59) formulated the following questions (partially reformulated by CJ):

1.   Who are the relevant actors in international politics?

2.   What are the characteristics of these actors?

3.   What are the relevant structures of international politics?

4.   How do these structures affect the actions of the actors?

5.   What are the relevant constellations of relationships and processes in international politics?

6.   How do actors interact and what processes of action can be identified?

7.   How do actors, structures and interaction mechanisms interact (under certain conditions) and how do they influence international politics?

8.   How do influences work back on actors, structures and processes of international politics?

9.   What dynamics characterize international politics, and how does the international system evolve?

2.2   Political Theories

According to Schimmelfennig (2013:63), the discussion of international relations is characterized by a series of debates between grand theories or schools of thought. Accordingly, the history of political science can be described by a sequence of debates.

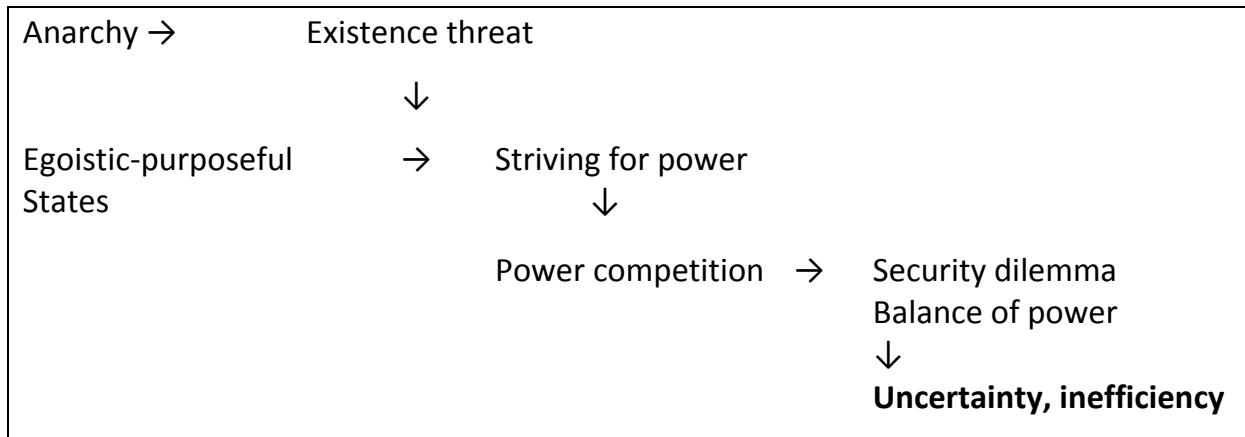| Level of analysis				
Paradigm	**System**	**State**	**Substate**	**Individual**
Realism	Balance of power, hegemonial stability theory	Revisionism versus status quo of power		Human nature as inherently aggressive
Liberalism	Liberal institutionalism; regime theory	Democratic peace theory	Complex interdependence theory	Human nature as inherently peaceful
Economic Structuralism	world system theory, dependency theory	State functions in the interest of the capitalist class	Corporations dominate politics	
Constructivism	Systemic norms (e.g., sovereignty)	Identity politics	Transnational actors, NGOs	
Feminism	Gender nature of systemic international relations theory	State as gender construct	Effects of separating the public from the private	Impact of international politics on women

Source: D'Anieri 2014:65.

We will discuss in more detail below the paradigms of realism, liberalism or liberal institutionalism, and constructivism.

The first great debate took place in **the first half of the 20th century** between **"realism"** and **"idealism",** the latter term being coined by the "realists" and meant disparagingly. Later, idealism was usually understood as "liberal theory." This debate centered on a core question of international relations: "Can international anarchy be overcome, or at least mitigated to the point where its most problematic consequences can be avoided, because of social developments or through deliberate political action?" (Schimmelfennig 2013:63). While

liberal theory affirmed this in principle - for example, by strengthening transnational exchange relations and international interdependence - the "realists" considered such developments too weak to relativize or channel international power competition (cf. Schimmelfennig 2013:63).

The realist position is summarized by the following schema:

| |
|---|
| Anarchy → Existence threat |
| ↓ |
| Egoistic-purposeful → Striving for power |
| States ↓ |
| Power competition → Security dilemma |
| Balance of power |
| ↓ |
| **Uncertainty, inefficiency** |

Source: Schimmelfennig 2013:67.

In this view, only states that strive for power, act rationally and egoistically are relevant international actors. Externally, states act like persons, according to a unified will and without political differentiation, as can be seen in domestic politics (cf. Schimmelfennig 2013:67). According to the realists, the distribution of power is the central issue in international politics-something along the lines of Morgenthau, who once said that international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power (cf. D'Anieri 2014:70). The realists emphasize the importance of military power, but see it as underpinned and justified by economic power (cf. D'Anieri 2014:70/71).

The realists - and to some extent other international political theories - distinguish international power systems, or more precisely power distribution systems, according to their polarity: is there one, two or more dominant political superpowers?

According to D'Anieri (2014:74), four main types of international power distribution systems can be distinguished: First, **unipolar** systems; second, **bipolar** systems; third,

tripolar systems; and fourth, multipolar systems. The following presentation is based on D'Anieri (2014:74) (modified and simplified by CJ):

Unipolar system:
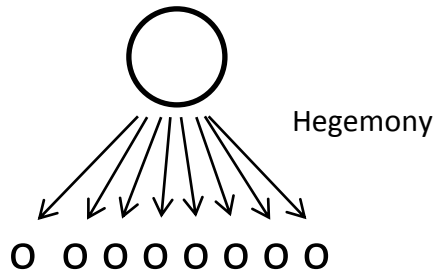
The hegemonic power sets the rules and opposes the autonomous actions of other actors. Examples would be the Roman Empire between the second century BC and the fifth century AD, or, according to some observers, the USA after 1991.
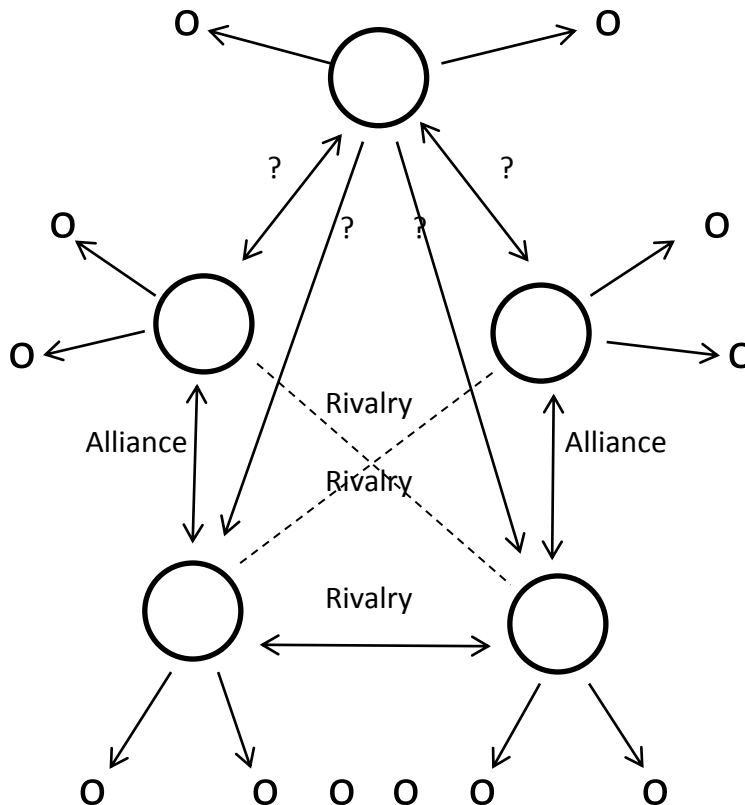
Bipolar system:
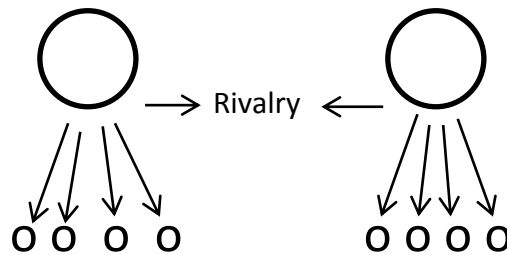
Two powers of roughly equal size compete for dominance. Both enter into alliances with weaker states. Examples were Athens and Sparta in the fifth century BC before the outbreak of the Peleponnesian War, or the Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union 1946 - 1990.

Tripolar system:
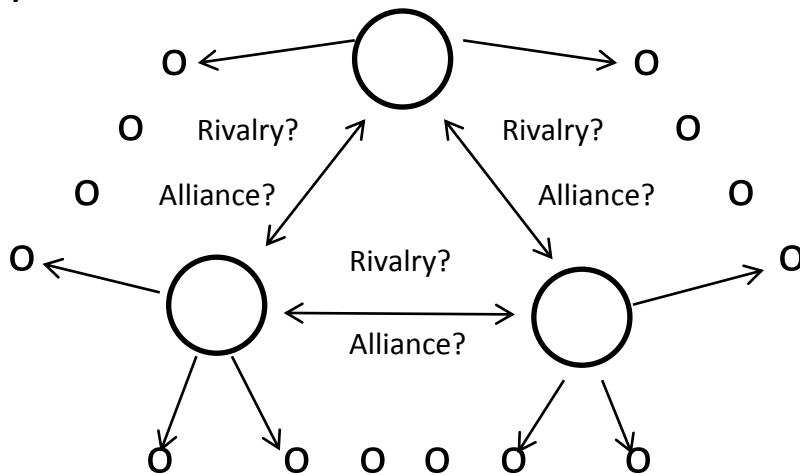
No equilibrium is possible between three powers of roughly equal strength. Each power tries to prevent a joint domination of the other two. Most political scientists believe that tripolarity cannot exist, and if it does, that it is extremely unstable. Some authors argue that the situation before World War II was a tripolar constellation.

Multitipolar system:

In a multipolar system, very different balances of power can exist. Many authors see the history of Europe as the history of a multipolar system, others interpret the world after 9/11 as a multipolar system.

From today's perspective, it quickly becomes clear that this view is highly simplified-partly because it is too formal and purely descriptive-and hardly does justice to the current international situation in its complexity.

This debate was reopened in the 1970s and 1980s, with a "neorealism" and a "neoliberal institutionalism" opposing each other at the time (cf. Schimmelfennig 2013:63). According to the latter, international organizations and institutions should counteract the negative effects of international anarchy and contribute to problem solving. Over time, institutionalism developed into an independent theory from liberalism (cf. Schimmelfennig 2013:63).
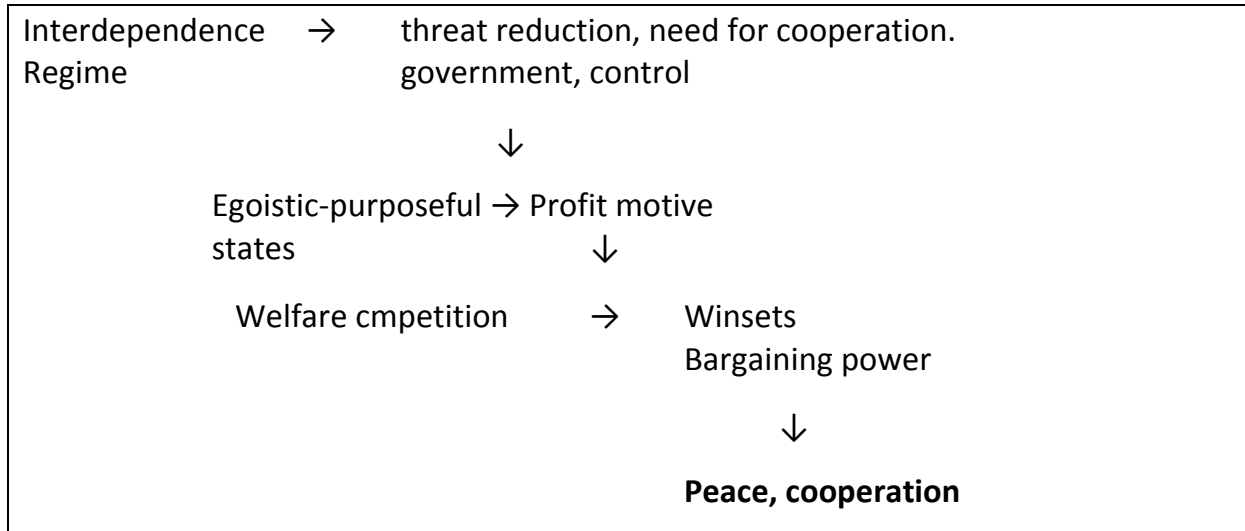
From realism, liberal institutionalism differs - especially by differentiating individual aspects - as follows:

Three dimensions of liberal theory		
Variant of Liberalism	*Level of analysis*	*Relation to reality and understanding of reality*
Liberal Institutionalism	Systemic understanding; includes basic assumptions and elements of the theory of the balance of power	Anarchic situation does not necessarily lead to conflict; cooperation is possible
Complex interdependence theory	Sub- or intra-governmental understanding, but not exclusive: Is focused on individuals, corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and organizations within governments	States are not the only important actors. Actors have different interests in international politics. Many international relations have little to do with military security
Democratic peace theory	State-centered: focuses on the question of the nature of government	Not all states are the same in essence. Liberal (democratic) states can resolve conflicts without war.

Source: D'Anieri 2014:79; edited by CJ.

The roots of institutionalism go back to early utopian designs. Because of its normative and utopian dimension, it was criticized as "idealistic." However, functional institutionalism was based on the observation of material changes in international systems, focusing primarily on the increase in international interdependence (cf. Schimmelfennig 2013:89). The main representatives of functionalism were David Mitrany (1888-1975) and Ernst Haas (1924-2003). Institutionalism expected increased international integration, assuming that international organizations would increasingly take over competences of nation-states. It also relied more on reciprocity to motivate noncooperative states to cooperate (see D'Anieri 2014:80). In this way, the state fragmentation of the international system would gradually be overcome. But this prognosis proved to be wrong-or at least premature (cf. Schimmelfennig 2013:89). Yet neoliberal institutionalism of the 1970s and 1980s remained close to the reality of a state system characterized by insecurity and power.

Schematically, the notion of institutionalism looked as follows:

Interdependence	→	threat reduction, need for cooperation.
Regime		government, control

<div align="center">↓</div>

Egoistic-purposeful → Profit motive
states   ↓

Welfare cmpetition   →   Winsets
                                Bargaining power

<div align="center">↓</div>

<div align="center">**Peace, cooperation**</div>

Quelle: Schimmelfennig 2013:91.

"Institutionalism differs from realism essentially in that interdependence and regime are added to international anarchy as effective structural features of the international system. Interdependence-the mutual dependence of states on one another-reduces the utility of military force, and thus the threat to states, on the one hand; on the other, it increases the need for international cooperation. International regimes (sets of rules) and the international organizations associated with them make it possible for this need for cooperation to be satisfied by setting rules, monitoring states' compliance with the rules, and punishing rule violations. Under conditions of interdependence, egoistic-purposeful states are not only strongly interested in international cooperation and peaceful coexistence; they also do not primarily strive for power but for (absolute) gains. This results in a process of welfare competition."
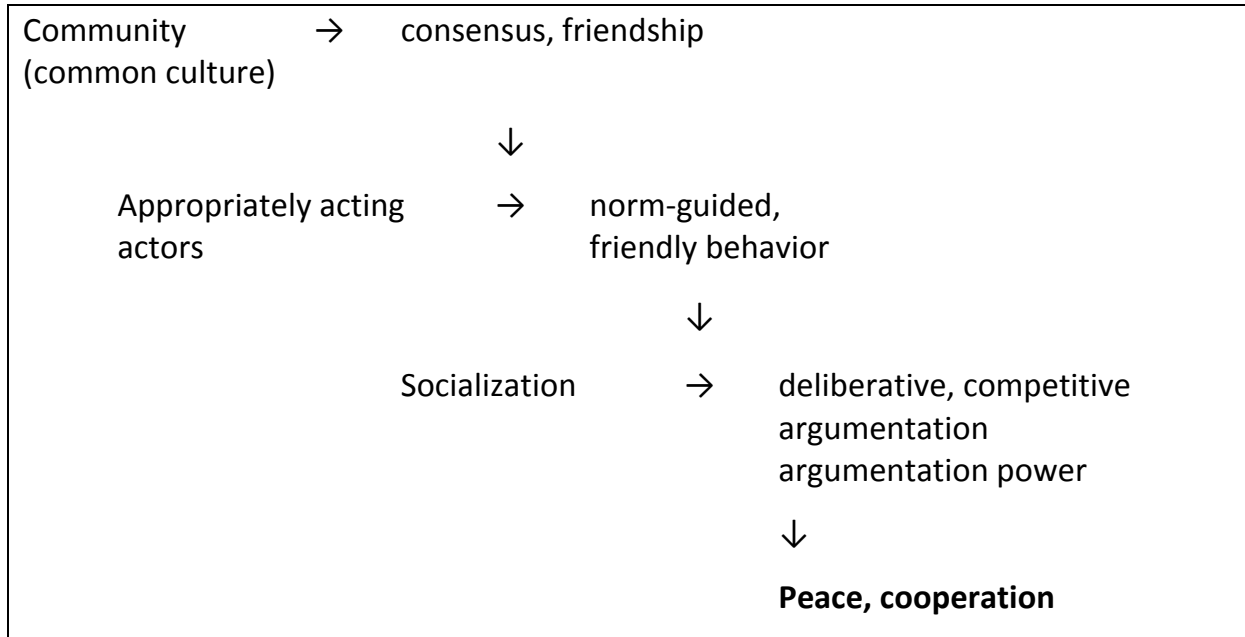Source: Schimmelfennig 2013:90).

However, institutionalism must be countered by the fact that international politics is hardly ever - at least not exclusively or even predominantly - rational, but that foreign policy and thus international politics still serve to a large extent as a projection surface for populist, extremist or ideological aspirations, as migration and asylum policy, for example, but also the criticism of inter- and transnational organizations and agreements show time and again. In Switzerland and other European countries, for example, criticism of the European Union and "Brussels" has recently increasingly shifted to international organizations, the UN, and even against the European Convention on Human Rights.

In the 1990s, there was a renewed shift in the discussion. Now the controversy was between **"rationalists"** and **"constructivists"**. While the rationalists assumed a purposive and egoistic basic attitude of international actors, constructivism put emphasis on the effectiveness of social constructions (cf. Schimmelfennig 2013:63). Issues such as ideas, attributions of meaning, identities, and norms were at the center of these considerations.

In contrast to the theories discussed so far, **constructivism** asserts that primarily "intersubjective" or ideational structures shape international politics because they not only influence actors' actions but already shape their desires (cf. Schimmelfennig 2013:160). In this context, the international system is primarily shaped and structured by socio-cultural elements such as cultures, norms, roles, etc. This means that **international politics** is essentially **socially constructed** (Schimmelfennig 2013:160).

Constructivism criticized the **realist, liberal, structuralist, Marxist, and institutionalist views** as essentially "materialist"-looking only at the material aspects and **overlooking the importance of ideas**: **Constructivism,** on the other hand, also **dealt with ideas goals**, **intentions** of international actors (cf. D'Anieri 2014:103), furthermore with interests, identities and norms of actors (cf. D'Anieri 2014:104-108). Cultural aspects - or what is thought to be cultural aspects - also flow into the constructivist view. Thus, Huntington's cultural circle model can also be seen as constructivist.

Schematically, constructivism, which incidentally has developed very many varieties, can be represented as follows:

Community   →   consensus, friendship
(common culture)

↓

Appropriately acting   →   norm-guided,
actors   friendly behavior

↓

Socialization   →   deliberative, competitive
                              argumentation
                              argumentation power

↓

Peace, cooperation

Source: Schimmelfennig 2013:162.

However, even constructivism does not deny that the international state system functions in a partially anarchistic way (cf. Schimmelfennig 2013:166). For a detailed discussion of the anarchistic aspects of international politics, cf. ► Unit D 40: "Transnationality and Nation-States."

According to Schimmelfennig (2013:64), there is currently "no new major debate ... in sight" in the political science discussion.

3. Control Questions

1.   With which two types of issues - according to Neyer - does political science deal?

2.   What third view of political science do Pelinka and Varwick add?

3.   Name at least four definitions of politics.

4.   What is meant by "polity", "policy" and "politics"?

5.   Name five questions with which, according to Schimmelfennig, political science is concerned in the field of international politics.

6.   How do representatives of realism view international politics?

7.   What four types of international power distribution systems can be distinguished in terms of polarity?

8.   How does liberal institutionalism differ from realism?

9.   Outline the view of constructivism and what distinguishes it from realism and institutional liberalism.

4.   Links

Politische Theorien
http://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/lexika/politiklexikon/18044/politische-theorien

Theorien der internationalen Politik
Text von Urs Marti
http://www.zora.uzh.ch/54557/1/UM_Theorien_der_IB.pdf

5.   Cited literature and further readings

Antonczyk, Erik / Feske, Susanne / Oerding, Simon (Hrsg.)
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D'Anieri, Paul
2014[3]:   International Politics. Power and Purpose in Global Affairs. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.

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2017:   Hidden Agendas. Geopolitik, Terrorismus und Populismus. Zusammenhänge Erklärungsmodelle Lösungsansätze. Nordhausen: T. Bautz Verlag.

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Pelinka, Anton / Varwick, Johannes
2010[2]:   Grundzüge der Politikwissenschaft. Wien: Böhlau / UTB.

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1999:   Social Theory of International Politics. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

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1995:   Hierarchy under Anarchy. Informal Empire and the East German State. In:
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