

# The role of realist theories in Grand Strategy formulation

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## ABSTRACT

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This article deals with realist theories' role in Grand Strategy formulation. International Relations theories explain the phenomena that occur in International System and evolve into new formulations based on reality observation. This process moves the social sciences, which goes from empiricism to effective verification through research methodologies application. Realist theories represent a consecrated paradigm in International Relations. They explain factors that intervene in International System States behavior, as well as the political body objectives. This Grand Strategy considers domestic and international aspects. This article, through content analysis, aims to identify the rationality role in National Interests choice within the countries Grand Strategy formulation, through International Relations theories. Using the content analysis method, concepts were decomposed, analyzing variables common points that make up Grand Strategy concept, as well as the realist theoretical premises. The conclusion is that the Grand Strategy, being long-term, uses realist theories features in its formulation, as well as rationality attributed to states, must be considered from the domestic political body actions, according to Classical Realism and Neorealism premises.

**Keywords:** Grand Strategy, Realism, National Interest.

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## INTRODUCTION

The International System (IS), understood as the grouping of States and their relations, has a complex organization that is constantly evolving, inducing or calling upon the various components of this environment and their respective powers to act in tandem with their domestic dynamics. In an attempt to explain the phenomenon of interaction among States, early studies attributed this dynamic to the distribution of relative power among the IS member States in pursuit of survival, which is the essence of the classical realist approach (Morgenthau 2003), or alternatively, to power maximization as advocated by neorealists (Waltz 1979).

Regardless of the State's objective or the theoretical lens through which the phenomenon is analyzed, in the end it comes down to a choice made by the State itself, according to national interests defined by the dominant coalition (De Mesquita et al. 2005a; Mintz and DeRouen Jr 2010). Whether due to systemic pressures, as in the neorealist approach, or by the State's own choice in the pursuit of survival, as in classical realism, or even through the perception of the dominant coalition, as neoclassical realism argues (Dyson 2016), there is always an objective to be pursued by the State within the IS dynamics.

This paper aims to analyze rationality in the decision-making process regarding the goals pursued by the State and how this impacts the formulation of Grand Strategy in light of the established theories of International Relations. Considering the incremental nature of knowledge, an evolutionary analysis of realist approaches will be conducted concerning the deontologically established goals of States and how these decisions materialize in Grand Strategy, as well as the connections with International Relations theories.

The study of International Relations is a field of knowledge that dates back to the early 20th century, with realism emerging to explain the imbalance in the IS, specifically the height of tensions, which is war (Lopez and Johnson 2020). At that initial stage, there were certain assumptions, particularly related to the rationality of decisions attributed to the State in matters of foreign policy (Schmidt and Wight 2023), as well as the pursuit of survival as the ultimate goal (Waltz 1979). By adopting stances aimed at achieving these goals, each country would act independently, primarily seeking its own interests. This singular movement generates the anarchic environment, which is also a premise of realist approaches.

The allegory of billiard balls colliding on a table, representing States in the IS, illustrates sovereignty in this anarchic environment. However, as Schweller (2006) argues, these billiard balls are guided by incentives that stem not only from the IS, as per neorealist thought, but also from the domestic environment. This explains why countries adopt different positions when subjected to similar IS incentives (Schweller 2006), which is the main counterpoint to the predictive aspects adopted by classical and neorealist theories.

Given the objective of this text, critical theories will not be addressed, since even though they present behavioral aspects of decision-makers, which are imbued with rationality, they are not intended to explain the modification of classical theoretical approaches, especially as this work is not concerned with the interaction between realist and critical schools (Cox 1981).

The evolution of realist theories resulted from their inadequacy in encompassing all cases observed at the time of their academic adoption—in other words, they were not fully applicable to all scenarios. There were variables not considered in the seminal works, which were later incorporated without abandoning the theoretical essence. The rationality attributed to the State entity (Schmidt and Wight 2023) will be contrasted with stimuli arising from the domestic environment. For neoclassical realists, the idea of rational State behavior is relativized in relation to the stimuli from the IS as perceived by the decision-making elite (Meibauer 2023). The transmission belts between external stimuli and the perception of the domestic political body are translated into actions aimed at power balancing or other responses (Schweller 2006), which do not follow the logic of classical realism or neorealism, both of which advocate for automatic responses.

The role of rationality differs across the various realist approaches, and this impacts the shaping of States' Grand Strategies. This rationality, initially attributed to the State by classical realism, was later shifted to the International System in neorealism, and eventually to the individuals making decisions, which is the focus of the neoclassical approach. The hypothesis of this article is that rationality, when attributed to different levels of analysis, does not operate equally—especially at the level of individual decision-makers.

A qualitative methodology will be employed to achieve the objective of this study. Among the available tools, content analysis will

be used, where the conceptual factors that characterize realist schools will be broken down and compared to those that compose the concept of Grand Strategy in search of congruence between realist schools and the conceptual spectrum of Grand Strategy.

To that end, this article is structured along a conceptual thread of components. Grand Strategy refers to the mobilization of means to achieve an end. The first section will discuss the component factors of realist theories. The following section will refine the concept of Grand Strategy. In the third section, the concept will be brought closer to the realist theories, at which point the points of convergence between them will be identified through an inductive construction culminating in a model.

### **Theories and Their Components**

In this section, a discussion about the rationality present in realist theories will be presented. The goal is to identify the role of rationality in each of them: in classical realism, neorealism, and neoclassical realism, since each of them has a different level of analysis and, consequently, a bias.

Theories are made up of concepts (Goertz 2006), and these, in turn, have components that individualize the object being addressed. Realism, as a theory, has conditions that must be met for the phenomenon under study to be properly subsumed. They are lenses through which phenomena in any area of knowledge can be observed, such as International Relations.

The phenomenon of interaction between states can be explained by different theories, and in this text, through realism and its derivatives, such as classical realism, neorealism, and neoclassical realism. The realist approach was chosen because of its prominence (Frankel 1996), since the inception of the field, guiding the choices of various countries in their foreign policy decisions, especially the great powers during different historical moments.

International Relations, as a field of study, originated from Political Science (Lopez and Johnson 2020), which sought to explain the reasons behind wars between countries, and gained the status of an autonomous science at the beginning of the 20th century. This proximity is explained by the interconnection between domestic decision-makers and the consequences of their decisions in the international system. This new field of study adopted paradigms that equated states under

the same premises, or independent variables, which, depending on their configurations, explained the adoption of certain actions by some states but not by others (Schweller 2006). Foreign policy analyses take these two environments into account, even developing models for interaction, such as the two-level game (Putnam 2010), in a Cartesian and predictive logic.

The complexity of the international system arises from several simultaneous intervening factors affecting the states and the system itself. It is not only the difference in the distribution of power, as neorealists argue, but also the different cultures that coexist in the international system (Buzan et al. 1998), which have different social and normative organizations according to their peculiarities. This aspect was captured by theories that emerged in opposition to realism, such as liberalism, constructivist theories, and critiques, as they have their own premises and understandings of what rationality is.

Understanding and dealing with these differences within the international system is the challenge of studying International Relations, as one of the objectives is to seek the determinants of wars (Lopez and Johnson 2020), which for some authors represents the pinnacle of irrationality. For the analysis of this complex system, it was necessary to adopt parameters for the operationalization of concepts, which are theories about ontology, about the fundamental constitutive elements of a phenomenon. The option for simplification, that is, the removal of variables, promotes the extension of the concept (Goertz 2006), increasing the number of explained cases but leaving aside important aspects when identifying the constitutive elements, and the insertion of adjectives reduces the range of phenomena covered, bringing it closer and closer to the observed object.

An example is the concept of democracy, which has its respective conceptually constitutive elements. Gary Goertz (2006) explores this concept, as democracy consists of factors such as free elections, party diversity, and a free press. However, when we adjective the concept, we individualize the case, as with the expression “social democracy,” which applies in certain countries and automatically excludes others. This happens because the concept of democracy contracts with the insertion of these attributes.

The choice to leave out conditions, which can also be called intervening variables, from the equation of the phenomenon makes the explanations insufficient, refining the theories to fill the space left by these

gaps. The incremental nature opens the possibility for the advancement of available knowledge, which increasingly highlights the differences between states in the observation and interactions between them in the analysis of the international system. These interactions occur at critical levels during wars, such as World War I, also known as the Great War, which was a driver for the field of International Relations studies, starting with the idealists and later with realists offering more fitting ideas for that moment (Korab-Karpowicz 2010).

Classical realism was a reaction to the idealists who believed that multilateral organizations could induce an environment of harmony in the international system, and these ideas emerged after World War I. The idealists were discredited with the failure of the League of Nations and the escalation of instability that led to World War II (Lopez and Johnson 2020), stimulating the realist current, which aimed to be a long-reaching theory with explanatory power for the phenomenon of war, acting inductively (Frankel 1996) in observing that moment and previous ones, even reaching back to the Peloponnesian War.

Hans Morgenthau created six principles related to classical realism, seeking to capture its theoretical essence. We can have a parameter of application for the necessary or sufficient aspects to observe the concept of grand strategy through the realist lens. The principles are: i) Politics is governed by objective laws that reflect human nature; ii) Interests are defined in terms of power; iii) Power is universally defined, but its expression varies depending on where it is exercised; iv) Moral principles are important but must be subordinated to the interests of political action; v) Moral principles are not universal; and vi) There is autonomy of the political sphere in relation to others, conferring rationality to action.

Classical realism has rationality as its premise. States act rationally in pursuit of their survival, meaning there are rational calculations that lead international system components to take actions aimed at remaining alive in this anarchic environment, which can be the main national interest (Frankel 1996). In this sense, the everyday actions of the political body that makes decisions, from the perspective of this theory, seek to maximize power as a way to maintain the status quo in the international system, with this premise being much more prescriptive than normative.

This prescription is important when decisions that affect the international system are made based on the realist epistemology, as the causes and consequences are known a priori according to the conceptual

and predictive framework formed inductively. Analyzing the case of the construction of the nuclear arsenal by the great powers after World War II, one can infer that this prescription did not fully fit that reality, as the use of that weapon would not bring the desired peace to any of the stakeholders, tarnishing the logic of desirable peace (Alsina 2018), which is a premise of grand strategy. Even though there was power maximization, the encounter of theory with reality showed that there are variables that make rational prescriptions less precise, modifying and generating unexpected reactions, reducing the explanatory power of the theory, which is the characteristic of falsifiability (Korab-Karpowicz 2010). The rationality assumed by realists comes from a backward look at the causes and consequences, i.e., a chain in search of a behavioral pattern, strengthening the theory for those cases, in a movement of endogeneity.

So far, we have dealt with a theory that gained strength after idealism failed to demonstrate applicability in that reality, with realism being more suitable to explain that moment between wars, through a less scientific approach, whose critiques motivated the advancement of this knowledge with more methodological rigor, through the evolution of classical realism into neorealism (Waltz 1979).

Neorealists advocate for a better positioning of the state in the international system. This level of analysis disregards the normative aspect of classical realism while grounding state decisions based on incentives and constraints arising from the international system (Morgenthau 2003; Waltz 1979). This approach sought to understand, among other reasons, the determinants of war. This theory admits that there is a certain level of cooperation between states, but based on relative gains in terms of positioning in the international system, in a utilitarian sense of cooperation.

Anarchy and rationality are concepts intimately related with the goal of preserving peace in the international system. Adopting decisions based solely on the anarchic characteristic cannot be the only parameter, as it may generate an imbalance in the world through erroneous perceptions by states about the international system. At this point, rationality prevents this mismatch from occurring, meaning that although there is no global governance, states do not live in a state of naturalism, respecting certain rules to which classical realists attributed to human nature.

Wars result from the rational choice of states to survive in an anarchic environment. Waltz (1979) defined this environment as the absence of a centralized government above states that could, for example,

regulate behavior or enforce contracts between them, finding equilibrium in wars. The constraints imposed by the international system to guide international relations, such as power balancing, international morality, and international law, ensure a relatively peaceful survival between states (Frankel 1996).

This allocation of resources may pose a problem to the stability of the international system, which is the level of analysis for neorealists. This approach is divided into offensive and defensive strands, the former advocating for a proactive stance by states, with Mearsheimer (2013) being the prominent exponent and questioning the balance of power; while the defensive side, from Waltz (1979), points out the imprudence of generating an imbalance in the power scale. Regardless of the strand, the security dilemma is one of the reasons countries go to war (Lopez and Johnson 2020).

There is a need to understand where countries' foreign policy choices reside and, if there are defined objectives, how will these interests be defended? The answer to this question leads to the necessary evolution of the theoretical field, advancing towards other premises that will give rise to new theories, such as liberalism and constructivist schools. These alternative currents to realism will not be addressed here, but they serve as a guide to direct the discussion towards neoclassical realism, as classical realism has conceptual limitations.

Maximizing power becomes the paradigm of neorealism, which abandons rationality, transferring the determinants of state behavior to the international system. Neorealism's premises resemble classical realism's, but the difference is that it is no longer just about surviving in the international system, but also maximizing relative power, comparing it to the structure of the international system that constrains or stimulates countries to adopt positions that serve their interests, in light of their relative capabilities.

There is also the premise of rational order, with the difference that rationality is attributed to the system (or structure) and not just to the state. This rationality's ultimate goal is to achieve a better positioning in the international system's structure. It is worth emphasizing that the most favorable choice is made based on the resources available to states in the international system, such as alliances, agreements, or even power enhancement through power-balancing actions (Schweller 2016). The belligerent nature of countries is evident, as opposed to the second major

“neo-neo” discussion in IR (Cox 1981), where neoliberalism is the theory that discusses the relationship between states in a more cooperative manner, meaning that there is no focus on better positioning in the international system, but a posture based on the common objective of states, revisiting the classical idea of the state as a provider of goods to its citizens.

These two realist currents dominated the study of International Relations since its inception. Many advancements have been made, almost all incrementally, but with the restriction that not all cases are explained by them. With the advancement of foreign policy studies, the focus shifted to the individual level of decision-makers, whether they are collective or individual, depending on the internal structure of states. A country's foreign policy began to be treated as public policy (Siqueira 2011), susceptible to domestic intervening factors.

The models resulting from the dialogue between the realist theories presented so far have made propositions about the process by which decisions are made by states as unitary entities. The rationality attributed to states persisted until the development of two models that began to observe both the domestic and international levels, which are the models of Putnam and Allison (2010), offering an innovation by guiding foreign policy decisions based on the interaction of these environments.

These two models have the paradigm of rationality as a backdrop. Putnam (2010) established the two-level game, connecting domestic politics with international politics in terms of negotiations, emphasizing the role of coalitions, preferences, and international pressures, all in a “board” in which diplomacy acts. Allison and Halperin (1972) emphasize the role of bureaucracies, focusing on government action and individual interaction. Although this decision-making model does not integrate all three levels of analysis, namely, the international system, the state, and individuals, the significant gain is the role of the latter in the process, as the rationality attributed to the state by classical realism had sidelined the determining role of the individual level in foreign policy decision-making.

This integration of the domestic and international plans culminates in neoclassical realism (Meibauer 2023). This current came to fill the knowledge gap regarding the questioning of the causes that led countries, which face similar constraints or stimuli, to adopt different positions, and the answer to this question lies in the perception of the dominant coalition (De Mesquita et al. 2005a; Schweller 2006). It is worth

noting that International Relations and Political Science meet again in this theory, where domestic disputes direct foreign policy actions.

Neoclassical realism does not abandon realist paradigms but advances knowledge when relativizing rational choice in terms of foreign policy. This relativization is explained by Schweller's (2006) model, which considers domestic variables as conditions in guiding foreign policy matters. When there is no interaction between the variables in the model, namely, elite cohesion, elite consensus, regime vulnerability, and social cohesion, there is a lethargy in the state's response to stimuli from the international environment, potentially risking its political survival when legitimacy declines (Tsebelis 2011). On the other hand, when there is a perception of risk to the coalition's survival, movements occur to counter these potential threats, legitimizing the dominant position.

Given the above, it is evident that realist paradigms address the rationality of the units of analysis in decisions on international political affairs. This rationality, however, is not the same in all three theories presented, initially due to the different levels of analysis and objectives they have. In classical realism, the rationality is of the state in surviving; in neorealism, the rationality is of the stability of the international system, and in neoclassical realism, the rationality is of the dominant coalition in legitimizing its maintenance in power.

These theories have framed various moments of modifications in the international system. This is important because the theories explained past cases while also applying to the contemporary context, where the dominant coalition draws on more than one theory to weigh decisions and seek support from the audience (Snyder 2004). Given that the goal of states is survival, or the best positioning in the international system, and even more collaborative behavior, whichever it may be, the option should be inserted into the country's Grand Strategy.

The rationality present in realist theories operates with different intensity in each of them. The very level of analysis inherent in each one induces this process. Through the decomposition of the component factors of the theories, the role of rationality was identified.

### **Grand Strategy**

The Commander of the ships, before engaging in combat, depending on the threat to be faced, determines the priorities to be

observed by the crew during the action, which are: fight, navigate, and float, in a multi-level analysis (Pinto, da Silva, and Pinheiro 2022), and the variations between these three components. This prioritization serves as a guide for the actions of each crew member and may be altered by Command as events unfold. In this same analogy, the priorities of a country are determined by the political body, with a longer timeframe and always considering the domestic and international dynamics in the decisions, with flexibility required for adaptation to the circumstances of the international system (IS).

Countries have interests that shape their behavior in the IS. This interaction with the international environment is the very definition of Foreign Policy, which requires instrumentalization for effective decisions about the country's direction, but not only that, as these formulations are part of a negotiation environment, which requires accommodation of interests to solve different problems within the domestic scope, and we are dealing with public policies, with Foreign Policy being one of them (Milani and Pinheiro 2013), which enters negotiations in this domestic political arena.

Public policies aim to solve existing problems and occur in political discussions, the appropriate arena for decision-making that directs the state's efforts in fulfilling its role, including in the IS. The accommodation of domestic demands increases the legitimacy of the decision-makers who, depending on the state's configuration, are either individual or collective, with this work being limited to collective decision-makers, known as the dominant coalition (De Mesquita et al. 2005).

The object of study in International Relations is the interaction between states in the IS. These interactions are guided by preferences and opportunities arising from this environment, as in this case, the adherence to neorealism is clear, and at this point, it is evident that theories can influence decision-makers to adopt stances based on expected gains and even the premises of this theory.

Grand Strategy has various definitions, and we must analyze its conceptual components to assess its adequacy to the constitutive elements of International Relations theories. A country's Grand Strategy is a fluid concept, and for this reason, it requires parameterizations for it to be applied. The aim is not to formulate a Weberian ideal-type Grand Strategy but to point out paths that indicate the essence of the concept. For this purpose, Gary Goertz's (2006) understanding will be adopted, which

advocates for an escalation of generalization in concepts (Goertz, 2006), as the individualization of the object results from its essence through attributes that interact with reality, based on Aristotelian scholastics in the formulation of groupings of these factors. This aspect is important when dealing with broad concepts in light of generalization and replicability.

Ways to operationalize concepts have been developed throughout the literature. Gary Goertz (2006) developed a three-level model, with the first level related to the concept used in theoretical propositions. The second level of the concept consists of the constitutive dimensions of the first conceptual level, which individualize the object, and refinement occurs at the level of indicators for measurement. As for the third level, this is where indicators evaluate which factor has more or less relevance, i.e., the quantitative level of concepts that are used to weigh the various factors that constitute the concept.

The components of the concept define the scope of application in the studied phenomena, within the second level, of independent variables. The more factors there are in the concept, the narrower the application spectrum, reducing the application of the concept, while the fewer the variables, the broader the scope, making generalization easier (Goertz, 2006), so the option falls on the phenomenon to be analyzed.

In this text, the choice is to include factors that are closest to the phenomenon, as the goal is to define Grand Strategy based on its components in terms of necessity and sufficiency, in light of realist theories. Although it is recognized that there are intrinsic factors in the contexts of countries that respond differently when subjected to similar stimuli from the IS (Schweller 2006).

In the works of authors addressing Grand Strategy, common attributes can be identified. Initially, Grand Strategy is long-term (Brands 2014), meaning that daily decisions produce results beyond the electoral calendar, and this must be considered in Foreign Policy discussions. Another common point among authors is the mobilization of available resources in the state, which must be done with a defined goal. These resources constitute the State's Power. This construction is confirmed through the analysis from the perspective of neoclassical realism, where the ability to mobilize and the willingness to take such action lead the country to alter its positioning in the IS (Schweller 2006).

The mobilization of resources by decision-makers in order to achieve a goal is a central aspect of the Grand Strategy concept. It is

necessary to clarify the relationship between the concept of Power and Grand Strategy. Power, due to its multidimensional nature (Brands 2014), refers to the resources available in society, and can be employed toward a goal defined by the decision-making group, emphasizing that it is not just military resources but also economic, cultural, or diplomatic, i.e., all the state's possibilities (Teixeira 2019), which may lead states to a better relative positioning in a hierarchical environment (Lake 2011), and even make war unnecessary (Ortmann and Whittaker 2016). Such resources must be capable of generating interference in the actions of others.

These ends defined by the dominant coalition are anchored in the domestic environment, which we can call National Interest, and is closely tied to Foreign Policy. The projection of the synthesis of National Interests on the international stage (Silveira, 1974) is the definition of Foreign Policy. From here, it can be affirmed that the national interest results from a decision-making process within the political sphere of the state (de Moraes, 1986).

Some authors advocate for the prominence of Foreign Policy over other policies, but regardless of this position, a country's political body tends to focus on those that occupy the agenda due to the social appeal of the issue, as resources are limited and need to be allocated to enhance the political survival of decision-makers (De Mesquita et al. 2005). Delegating Foreign Policy to a secondary position causes decisions to be made by other actors, implementing pre-defined policies, which is the apex of rationality. But how can we know which policy should be implemented if there is no consensus, or even discussion, in the political arena?

The study of Grand Strategy necessarily involves the interaction between the domestic and international environments. To account for this phenomenon, it is essential to use the framework of Neoclassical Realism, which moves away from the state as a unitary actor acting rationally to maximize its gains and includes the role of domestic bureaucracies in determining a country's position in the IS. This theory explains why there are countries with such a turbulent domestic environment that they leave Foreign Policy issues secondary (Schweller 2006).

While there is a close connection between Grand Strategy and Neoclassical Realism, other forms of realism directly influence the formulation of that concept. Returning to classical realism, which at its core is concerned with states' security and the pursuit of their objectives in terms of national interest and the struggle for power, this group favors a

successful policy based on prudence, with calculated actions based on the probable political consequences, the idea that human nature is reproduced in the IS is a possibility for inserting the role of decision-makers in the pursuit of national preservation, as well as the best positioning in the IS. Power plays a predominant role when each country must be able to ensure its survival in this self-interested environment where security is paramount (Korab-Karpowicz 2010).

### Adequacy of Theories to Grand Strategy

From the decomposition of the constitutive elements of the theories and the concept of Grand Strategy, it is possible to contrast them. To facilitate understanding, tables were created containing the factors for a detailed analysis of the adequacy of the concept to the theory. Table 1 refers to classical realism and Grand Strategy.

**Table 1 - Comparison of Classical Realism and Grand Strategy**

<b>Realismo Clássico*</b>	<b>Grande Estratégia**</b>
A política é governada por leis objetivas que refletem a natureza humana	Direcionada ao Longo Prazo
Os interesses são definidos em termos de poder	Definido pela Coalizão Dominante
O poder é universalmente definido	Objetivo de Interesse Nacional
Os princípios morais não são universais	Combina visão e racionalidade com Poder
Os princípios morais são importantes, mas devem estar subordinados aos interesses da ação política	Formulada pelos decisores
Existe a autonomia da esfera política em relação às demais	Mobilização de recursos

Source: \* (Morgenthau, 2003); \*\* (Brands, 2014)

From the analysis of the table, it is clear that there are points of contact between the components of Grand Strategy and those of Classical Realism, although there are also controversial aspects. The idea of mobilizing power assets is necessary and aligns with the ultimate goal of states according to the premises of this theory, as the action would lead to the security of the state and the guarantee of its prosperity (Ortmann and Whittaker 2016). On the other hand, the long-term direction inherent to Grand Strategy contrasts with the urgency of security, which is closely related to an assessment of the IS in which the state is embedded, within that specific context, that is, in a short-term spectrum. In this sense, rulers depend on quick results to gain legitimacy for their leadership (Brands 2014), creating a necessary condition that excludes the perfect adequacy of the theory, as decisions are confined to electoral agendas (Snyder 2004;

Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas 2007). Survival is a realist premise (Silove 2018), and Grand Strategy must consider this forecast as the ultimate goal of the state, leaving aside other intermediate goals to be pursued.

States, which are the unit of analysis, are also the recipients of ideas stemming from the concept of Grand Strategy. These entities will carry out the dictates of the formulated Grand Strategy, which has an ultimate focus on survival, and will do everything possible to achieve this goal through their inherent powers.

Regarding Neorealism, this school emerged with the aim of offering more scientific analysis of International Relations. The great appeal of the theory lies in the analysis of the systemic level that encourages states to adopt certain stances, also referred to as “images” by Waltz (1979), directing the behavior of states. Since it emerged in a bipolarity environment, a critique of this theory lies in the fact that there was a natural alignment by states at that time.

This alignment, depending on the bias, whether capitalist or communist, already carried the state’s objective. This positioning already offered the goal to be pursued, meaning there was a pragmatic alignment and a Foreign Policy dependent on countries around one or the other power. The option was exclusive, i.e., those adopting the capitalist ideology with the United States were automatically opposed to communism, and vice versa, although this logic disappeared over time. What is relevant in this text is the analysis of Grand Strategy in light of neorealism.

We will present the main conceptual constructs of the theory and also of Grand Strategy and analyze the points of contact

**Table 2 - Comparison of Neorealism and Grand Strategy**

<b>Neorealismo*</b>	<b>Grande Estratégia**</b>
Direcionada ao curto prazo	Longo Prazo
Comportamento previsível dos Estados	Mobilização de recursos
Distribuição de poder no SI define o comportamento	Objetivo de interesse Nacional
Anarquia é direcionador do comportamento dos Estados	Formulada pelos decisores
Balaceamento de Poder	(Não há comparação com outros países, mas somente o posicionamento daquele Estado formulador)
Lógica da sobrevivência	(Não há comparação com outros países, mas somente o posicionamento daquele Estado formulador)

Source: \* (Waltz, 1979); \*\* (Brands, 2014)

From the analysis of the table, not many differences can be inferred compared to the analysis of classical realism. The scientific approach offered to the theory did not substantially alter its application to the

concept of Grand Strategy. However, one aspect related to the criticisms of neorealism should be considered in this analysis. As previously explained, this theory emerged during a period of bipolarity, and the critique lies in the fact that neorealism disregarded historical processes and the formation of interests. The scientific nature of the theory overlooked the influence of the individual level, considering only rational choice, which in reality represented a pragmatic alignment at that specific moment in history, as well as the National Interest being pre-established from this decision.

States do not make decisions based solely on one theory and its components. Inevitably, they rely on aspects from one theory or another, or even a combination of two or more, both in their actions and in the discourses they construct. An example of this is a speech that says: "... America is safer when liberty advances..." (Snyder 2004, free translation).

When we address the formulation of Grand Strategy, there is a conceptual difficulty in light of the theories, as all of them deal with threats, and Grand Strategy does not necessarily focus solely on this point. Theories emphasize short-term actions to ensure the survival of the state, whereas Grand Strategy, in turn, has a long-term temporal scope. This is why countries do not apply this concept in their formulations, given that a successful Grand Strategy is an exception (Brands 2014).

Grand Strategy is not a plan, but a process, or even a set of ideas (Brands 2014; Silove 2018). These formulations must be revisited from time to time. A notable case is Brazil in the late 1970s, when it denounced the Agreement it had maintained with the United States since 1952. That agreement represented a pragmatic alignment at the time it was made, but over time, Brazil realized that this alignment was detrimental to what was understood as the National Interest, leading to the denunciation of the agreement and a shift towards an independent Foreign Policy, logically focused on its own gains, since the Military Assistance Program (MAP) brought no benefits to the country.

The evolution of knowledge in terms of International Relations studies observed the advent of Neoclassical Realism. This school differs from other realisms by considering the domestic environment in its analyses, although Putnam's (2010) two-level logic had already considered these two environments in foreign policy decisions, in the same vein as Allison and Halperin (1972). These two authors sought to understand the negotiation processes and the role of bureaucracies in this process, which has much in common with what would later be referred to as neoclassical

realism.

### Quadro 3 - Comparação Realismo Neoclássico e Grande Estratégia

Realismo Neoclássico*	Grande Estratégia**
Direcionada ao curto prazo	Longo Prazo
Papel do ambiente doméstico e decisores	Mobilização de recursos
Análise de Política Externa	Objetivo de interesse Nacional
Incentivos do SI	Formulada pelos decisores
Percepção de ameaças pelos decisores	(O foco dos decisores é mais pragmático)
Foco no comportamento individual dos Estados	(O foco dos decisores é mais pragmático)

Source: \* (Schweller, 2006); \*\* (Brands, 2014)

The analysis of the table clearly shows the alignment of this theory with the concept of Grand Strategy. The main point of similarity is the predominant role of the individual level, both in the theory and in the formulation of Grand Strategy, establishing the role of the rationality of individuals in this formulation and explaining why states do not act in a predictable way in the international system.

State-centric theories do not provide a foundation for the interaction between the domestic and international spheres (Putnam 2010). This aspect is important since Foreign Policy deals with the sum of all interactions of the state with the world, and Grand Strategy is the link between short, medium, and long-term actions (Brands 2014), through daily actions with long-term gain objectives.

Grand Strategy shapes Foreign Policy. Depending on the dominant coalition, adhering to the electoral cycle (Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas 2007), it is abandoned each time there is a leadership change, tarnishing the logic of Grand Strategy. The temporal spectrum is one of the conceptual differences between the institutions. The role of leadership lies in the fact that, even without engagement, they make long-term decisions, and even if decision-makers do not pay attention to Grand Strategy, it influences their actions (Brands 2014).

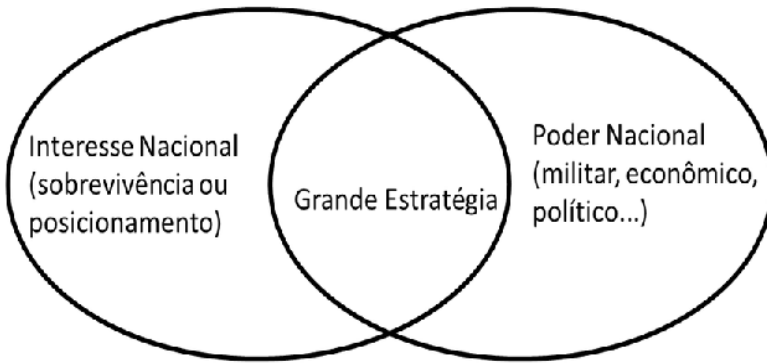
This temporal aspect is one of the limiting factors in applying theories to the formulation of a country's Grand Strategy. Just as time causes theories to evolve due to specific contexts, Grand Strategy, when consciously pursued, crosses different contexts in the international

system, such that the search for security generated by the actions of certain countries may trigger a balance of power movement (Schweller 2006), which is one of the realist premises. However, the decision must stem from the perception of the decision-making elites that the security-seeking actions of a country could indeed represent a threat to others.

Grand Strategy must seek or envision a future positioning of a state in the international system. The recognition of the state's place is a subjective aspect, made in comparison to other countries (Lake 2011), and hierarchy is the result of the National Power developed and mobilized. This power is measured by variables embedded in the state's structure; however, not all factors contribute to the country's position in the international arena, but only those within the National Interests. When this coincides with a factor of power, it creates the favorable ground for the state's Grand Strategy.

At this point, it is possible to discuss the model for incorporating Grand Strategy by decomposing the components of power. As previously presented, a state's National Power pertains to the factors that differentiate it, stemming from aspects related to its formation in relation to its mobilizable assets, but it is a necessary condition for discussions among the ruling elites over time. Regarding the National Interests related to the country's direction and positioning in the international system, it is also necessary that such objectives be shaped by political elites, who mobilize resources from National Power to achieve results in Foreign Policy. This mobilization of assets constitutes what is known as Grand Strategy, which is placed within the Venn diagram, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 - Graphical Representation of Grand Strategy**



Preparation: Author.

The analysis of the figure suggests that there is a strong interaction between National Interest and National Power, and it is not enough for them to simply exist; they must be brought into discussion in the domestic environment, and this intersection is defined as Grand Strategy. The factors outside the intersecting area are not sufficient to be mobilized by the political body, but they must be on the agenda of National Interest discussion, becoming an aspect of Grand Strategy. According to the model presented, several factors can be invoked and others removed from this intersection area, maintaining a certain degree of continuity in the state's history when invoked by the political body.

Similarly, the objectives of states and their power components do not represent a single entity. The analysis of each of them is essential to understand the domestic decisions that influence the shaping of a state's Grand Strategy. These thematic areas are not isolated, possessing interconnections that make it impossible to define the boundaries of each one. For this reason, in order to establish a parameter for determining a state's interests in the international system, there is a contextual fluidity that changes over time, making Grand Strategy a perpetual process subject to modifications. However, it cannot be left undiscussed, as this would lead to a narrow-minded view by the decision-making elites, subjecting the state to the dictates of the international system rather than focusing on its sovereignty.

The importance of international relations theories lies in how

they define Power, which is invariably Military Power, determining the country's position in the international system (Waltz 1979). This conception has been adapted to consider other factors of power, such as economic, political, and cultural factors, which are considered soft-power assets that can also be mobilized or even enhanced in pursuit of National Interest, which, in the case of realisms, ultimately revolves around survival or better positioning in the international system.

## CONCLUSION

Theories that attempt to explain International Relations evolve incrementally. Far from seeking an explanation for all phenomena, the dynamics of the international system drive theories to a constant evolution. By identifying other variables, they encompass more cases to be accommodated in the epistemology of IR, which still do not generate a single truth. However, States, as units of analysis or figures, according to Waltz (1979), exhibit similar behaviors under certain circumstances and different ones under others when subjected to similar stimuli (Schweller 2006). The response to a threat was initially explained by the rational choice of survival under the guidance of classical realism, and in other cases, a decision to do nothing in response to the perceived threat arose from internal structures within the States, as explained by neoclassical realism.

This text aimed to identify the connections between theoretical premises and the formulation of Grand Strategy, with a focus on the role of rationality. Considering that it is a long-term concept, dependent on the discussion of National Interests to be pursued through the mobilization of resources toward this objective, rationality operates at the individual level of decision-makers, both in the formulation of Grand Strategy and in the application of theories in a less rigid manner than originally presented, offering flexibility and freedom to the State in formulating its goals.

Regardless of the periods during which theories explain specific contexts, Grand Strategy must remain flexible and adapt to these uncertainties. Flexibility (Drezner, Krebs, and Schweller 2020) allows the identification of traits from one theory or another within the theoretical premises of Grand Strategy, some carrying more relative weight and others less importance for the conceived context, but all adhering to the variables that constitute the concept of Grand Strategy.

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