

Realism

Calvin and Hobbes

BY WATTERSON

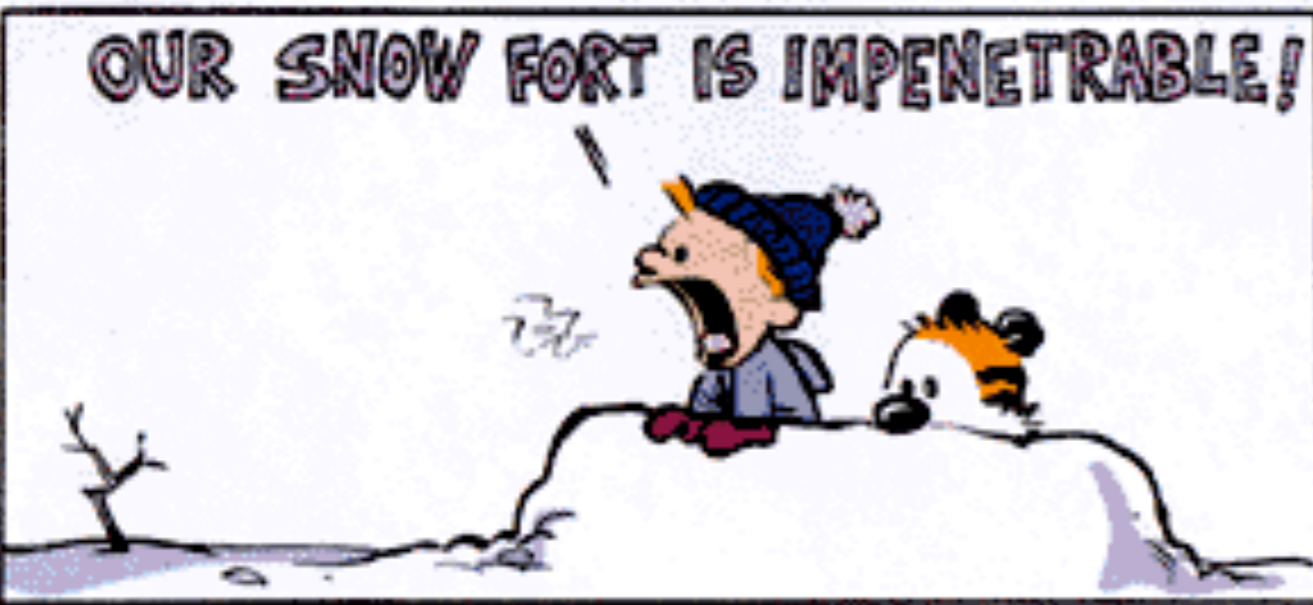
THERE! OUR FORTRESS IS COMPLETELY INDESTRUCTIBLE!



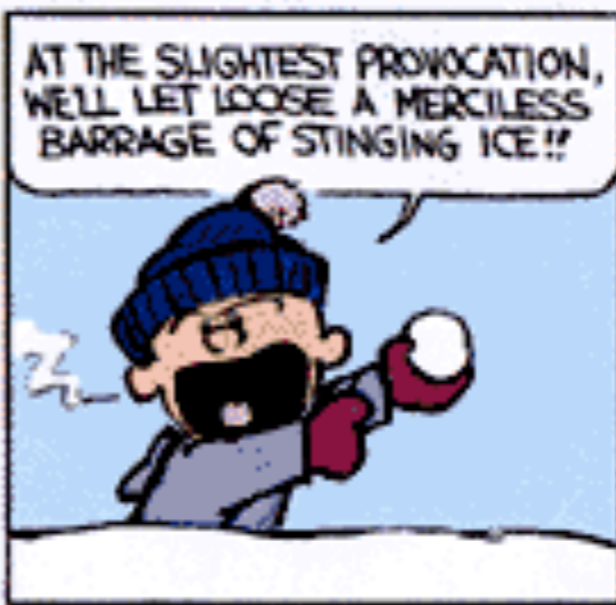
"SUNNY AND WARMER TODAY, HIGH IN THE UPPER THIRTIES..."



OUR SNOW FORT IS IMPENETRABLE!



AT THE SLIGHTEST PROVOCATION, WE'LL LET LOOSE A MERCILESS BARRAGE OF STINGING ICE!!



NONE DARE ATTACK US! WE RULE ALL!!



TOGETHER, A VERITABLE FIST OF DEFIANCE, WE STAND IMMUNE TO ANY ONSLAUGHT!



WE ARE INVINCIBLE!! WE ...UH... UMM...



PIFF!



Great power conflict?

- 2018: New National Defense Strategy (NDS) released by the Pentagon
- Top threat: Russia and China
 - “We face growing threats from revisionist powers as different as China and Russia ... nations that do seek to create a world consistent with their authoritarian models,”
-Defense Secretary James Mattis
 - “China is a strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea”
 - “Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and pursues veto power over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbors”

Realism

- Thucydides sums up Realism pretty well:
 - “Strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”
- History is the story of war interspersed with periods of preparation for war
- Realism Motto: Nature red in tooth and claw

Peer discussion

- If you had to sum up Realism in three or four key words (besides war!), what would they be?

Anarchy

- **Critical concept!**

Not necessarily anarchy



Anarchy

- When the term anarchy is used in international relations, we mean only that the international system has no power or actor over the states that can force the states to adhere to particular set of rules or code of behavior.
- Contrast this with the situation inside states.



Realism

- Core elements of realism: the three S's (and one z)
 - Statism
 - Survival
 - Self-help
 - Zero-sum
- International politics is the struggle for **power**

Statism

- Inside the state: struggle for order and security resolved.
- State is the primary guarantor of the domestic structures that generate and perpetuate order and security
- Accordingly, the State is the primary interface between the order and security of internal society and the disorder and insecurity of the external system.

Survival

- Anthropomorphization of the State
- State as the individual who seeks to remain alive

Self-Help

- States can only rely on themselves to ensure survival
- Gives rise to the Security Dilemma
 - Derived from the zero-sum nature of the world: To ensure one's own security is to undermine the security of the other, since one's gains is another's loss.
 - The security dilemma drives a spiral of distrust and uncertainty that drives political and military conflict.

Rousseau's parable: the stag hunt

- Analogy for the international system
- Five hungry people meet one day
 - Hunger can be satiated two ways: $\frac{1}{5}$ of a stag or 1 hare
 - To catch a stag, all five must work together, but much better than each trying to catch hares on their own. No guarantee on either
 - All five agree to work together.
 - They find a stag and work to corner it...suddenly one of the people finds a sleeping hare. Quickly thinking, he realizes it is in his interest to abandon the stag hunt and eat the hare.
 - The other 4 go hungry...

Zero Sum

- Security in the international system is a fixed and limited quantity.
- Each state has some amount of security.
- Security gains by one state necessarily results in a decrease in security in other states
- Zero sum = a pie. The bigger my slice, the smaller yours

Classical Realism

- Major thinkers: Thucydides, Machiavelli, Rousseau, Morgenthau
- Drive for power arises out of human nature.
- Variation in the perception of the need to moderate drive for power. Modern theorists in the tradition argue for wise leadership and the pursuit of national interests that are compatible with international order.

Structural or Neo-Realism

- Looks to the structure of the international system
 - International system: Anarchy | Domestic system: hierarchy
- Kenneth Waltz (1979): Theory of International Politics
 - Three critical variables explain international outcomes
 - Organizing principle: anarchy
 - Differentiation of units: None, all units are states (alike)
 - Distribution of capabilities: POWER!

Distribution of Capabilities

- Critical variable for understanding international outcomes
 - Organizing principle and differentiation of units are invariant.
 - Only distribution of capabilities changes over time, producing changes in the international system
- Number of great powers in the system dictates the type of system and the propensity for war
 - Multipolar: Least stable international order (difficult to maintain balance of power, miscommunications, etc.)
 - Unipolar: moderately unstable international order
 - Bipolar: most stable international order (easiest to maintain balance of power)

Defensive Realism

- Typified by Waltz
- States want as much power as they need to ensure security
- Security, not power, is the primary goal
- States with sufficient security are status quo states and seek to maintain sufficient defensive power to ensure security.

Offensive Realism

- Typical thinker: John Mearsheimer (U of Chicago)
- States want as much power as possible; anarchy requires the maximization of relative power
- No status quo states
- Best position is global hegemon, but such a position is impossible, thus the world condemned to endless great power competition.

Where are the 3 S's?

- Statism is clear: Both Defensive and Offensive
Realists only talk about States
- Survival: tied directly to Self-Help
- How to guarantee survival? Balancing
 - Internal balancing: arms buildup security dilemma
 - External balancing: balance of power, alliances

Science and Realism

- This is the most 'scientific' of the variants of Realism
 - claims validity across time and space.
 - The laws of international relations it describes are applicable no matter the time frame of the location we choose to discuss.

Neoclassical Realism

- Typical thinkers: Randall Schweller, Stephen Walt
- Critical of Structural Realism: Too Parsimonious
- Need to bring in domestic level factors
 - Perceptions of leaders (Obama versus Bush)
 - State Strength
 - Motivations of State

Power

- Critical to the Realist approach
- What do we mean when we talk about power?
 - Power is both relational and relative
 - Traditionally defined in terms of military capabilities

Peer Discussion

- Why might both military power and capabilities be problematic as measures of power?

Morality

- Is there space for morality in Realism?

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