

Post-Realism, Just War, And the Gulf War Debate

Prepared for Ofer Feldman and Christ'l de Landtsheer, Eds.

Politically Speaking: A Worldwide Examination of Language Use in the Public Sphere

Westport CN: Praeger, 1998.

Francis A. Beer

Political Science Department

University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado

beer@colorado.edu

<http://socsci.colorado.edu/~beerball/>

Robert Hariman

Department of Rhetoric and Communication Studies

Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa

robert.hariman@drake.edu

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Abstract

Realism, the traditional theory of international relations, constructs a simple, taut narrative of world politics. Realist science parsimoniously describes a system in which the main characters are nation states, motivated by power interests, locked in a permanent structure of deadly combat. Post-realism develops a more complex theory for a more evolved global system. It reframes realist theory as one rhetoric, powerful in its own right, among multiple contending rhetorics. Post-realism emphasizes the increasing importance of world actors other than nation states, driven by motivations other than power, combining in cooperative as well as conflictual ways. Post-realism suggests that international strategy includes three critical dimensions: competition, control, and critical judgment. Strategy, so conceived, blends self-interest, interactions with others, ethics and morality. It emphasizes the inventory and distribution of alternative cognitive schemata, their place in political rhetorical repertoires, and their importance in the discursive formation and shaping of coalitions that advance simultaneously national and international interests. A short example of this process at work is the U. S. Congressional debates over the Gulf War. The debates included a series of claims and counter-claims, framed in terms of just war doctrine, about the validity of U. S. policy and actions. The debates showed multiple political actors talking international theory that included realist and post-realist dimensions. The rhetoric of just war legitimated national interests within the democratic process to shape foreign policy and construct the institutions and structures of a normative international regime, the New World Order.

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Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman

REALISM AND POST-REALISM

Realism is the traditional, historical theory of international relations, reformulated in recent years as neo-realism. It includes important narratives, among which are stories of itself and of the world. Realism presents itself as the primary actor in the world of theory, with greater power than other theories. Its taut story of world politics includes the following important elements. (1) Nation states are the primary characters of world politics. (2) Nation states are ranked by their power, measured mostly in terms of material capabilities, especially military force. (3) Nation states conduct their foreign policies on the basis of national interest defined in terms of power. They calculate and compare benefits and costs of alternative policies and use all available means, including war. 4). The competition for power is permanent and ubiquitous. The story of realism continues indefinitely, often with consequences that are tragic in human terms.

With the end of the Cold War and the transformation of the international environment, critics have increasingly attacked this view. They believe that realism has serious deficiencies as positive theory, failing fully and accurately to describe, explain, and predict international behavior. Post-realism makes the same charge and goes on to challenge the very positivistic bases upon which realism rests. Post-realism takes a linguistic turn and suggests that realism is not only scientific positivistic theory, but also--more significantly--a form of rhetoric representing itself as scientific positivistic theory. Realist theory is thus not only detached scientific observation, but also speech action. As realism describes, explains, and predicts the world, it also constructs, shapes, forms, and controls it (Beer and Hariman, 1996).

Post-realists go beyond criticism and to construct world politics persuasively in other ways. There is more to the story than realists admit, and post-realists supply missing parts of the tale. Elements of the post-realist narrative include the following. (1) Nation states are not the only important characters in international relations. International organizations such as the United Nations, domestic political factions, public opinion, and individuals all affect global events. (2) Power does not just grow from the barrel of a gun. International interactions are complex, and non-material capabilities can be significant. Power is difficult to generalize and project and has very important dimensions that are embedded in specific issues and places. (3) Foreign policy cognition is thicker, denser, hotter than realism believes. There is more to decision-making than simple motivations of national interest defined in terms of power, benefits and costs, ends and means. National elites have singular memories of history and its lessons, unique perceptions that shape their views of policy situations and their political decisions. They are

concerned with the legal, ethical and moral rules of their communities, and they can be emotional. (4) Decision-makers are not necessarily bound by realist narrative, by its characterization or plot. Decision-makers appear in many different forms; they can construct themselves in many different ways. They can and do make a difference.

Post-realism, like realism, recognizes logic and facts; unlike realism, post-realism also recognizes rhetoric. Taking a linguistic turn, it emphasizes narrative as an important means of persuasion, with realist narrative being a primary example. Post-realism relies on criticism and the formulation of alternatives. It involves deconstruction and reconstruction, a rereading of texts, a rewriting of concepts and practices to achieve a thorough revision of realist discourse. The turn into post-realism also involves an emancipatory dynamic; a renewed emphasis on agency, action, and freedom; a belief that a post realist can affect his or her world. While sensitive to the claims of objective science, determinant structures and processes, it sees at the same time that these are human creations, the resultants, the emergent properties, of scientific and political practice. Post-realists broaden scientific inquiry to include a complex field of analytical frameworks. These frameworks are shaped in such a way that they are suitable for analyzing not only an objective Other, but also, the more important subjective Self. Post-realism thus implies reflexivity; it suggests self-awareness that is enhanced by a heightened sensitivity to speech. Finally, post-realism combines strategy and ethics, power and prudence, cultural context and interpretation, persuasion and psychology. These combinations emerge more clearly from a reconsideration of the realist doctrine of strategy, to which we now turn.

Post-realism incorporates these concerns in a three-tiered pyramid model of strategic action that includes competition, control, criticism (Hariman, 1989). The first level, and the broadest, is the competitive calculus. The actor in this primitive situation is similar to Hobbes' natural man, driven by basic needs or instincts or drives. In the state of nature, where "man is a wolf to man" the actors compete with each other for scarce resources. This level is pure realism, with its heavy reliance on self-interest and the strategic interaction of self-interested actors as they are typically represented in rational choice and game theoretic formulations

The second level is control, particularly self-control. While the first level of competition emphasized interaction with the Other, the second level of control emphasizes the construction of the Self. The Self, like Machiavelli's Prince, recognizes the chaos and unpredictability of the competitive situation in the guise of fortuna. In response, s/he focuses on controlling what is most controllable: the persona or virtue of the ruler or decision-maker (Hariman, 1995). This persona is always calculating, manipulating, reacting to the competitive environment and -- first and foremost -- constructing itself as an imposing and intimidating character that others will obey. It is better for the Prince to be feared than loved, believes Machiavelli. Self-control is the attribute of this character essential to produce this outcome.

The argument to this point reflects and is consistent with classical and modern realist discourse. The third level of strategic action, critical judgment, takes us into new territory, well beyond modern realism's comfort zone. It is the critical turn, the defining move of Post-realist strategy. It draws upon the work of strategist Karl von Clausewitz and particularly his

elaboration of the importance of "Kritik" which can be roughly translated as "criticism." As Clausewitz defined it, Kritik is the process of moving strategic analysis through a hierarchy of perspectives that incorporate ever more diverse criteria and standards for judgment. The application of Kritik does not deny the validity of lower level analyses, but it does allow the strategist to re-introduce previously bracketed considerations. Furthermore, from the perspective of Kritik, no account of the action is ruled irrelevant simply because it does not fit with a lower level analysis. Thus, this form of critical thinking, which seems unnecessary to explain actions in simple competitive situations, allows us to compare and translate different, perhaps incommensurable, accounts that may question the very nature of such situations

This idea develops more fully when it is restated as part of the linguistic turn. After the move to the highest level, strategic thinking becomes explicitly a form of interpretation. The strategist has to be able not only to assess the array of forces and to gauge political objectives and constraints but also to understand different accounts of the situation stated in different ways. Instead of presuming that outcomes are determined by the logic of a primitive strategic situation and the natural laws of coercion in a static political environment, the strategist presumes that the meanings of strategic conflicts are not easily predicted from any one set of variables. Instead of an autonomous mode of analysis and a single language of calculation, the strategist recognizes that different languages offer different realities, different meanings, and different means for motivating reactions. Thus, the strategist has to be able to translate, learn from, and perhaps act in accord with, discourses that reflect different cultural practices and communal interests than those explicitly represented in the typical formulations of grand strategy.

Law, ethics, and religion become more serious concerns at the highest level of strategy because they are now understood in a different way. Where realists saw irrelevant distractions, post-realists recognize important and accurate maps of complex social formations. This wide screen also captures previously neglected discourses of the peoples caught in the field of conflict, whether they are there as enemies, collaborators, or bystanders, and regardless of their level of "civilization." We cannot presume that any of their perspectives is inadequately informed or inconsequential, but have to look to each for knowledge, symbolic resources, and constraints potentially at work in the situation. Likewise, we cannot rule that an argument is not sufficiently "military" or "geo-political," for the strategist has to consider whether success on those terms could be damaging to broader political, social, or ecological objectives.

In short, there are many levels of discourse impinging upon the strategic situation, and the strategist will be more likely to succeed by recognizing how the "horizontal" means-end calculus within any account of the situation also has to be matched by a "vertical" attempt to gain maximum interpretive power. One's thinking will always be bracketed; questions of utility and effectiveness, speed and impact will be paramount. But the genius lies in the ability to discern which discourses for interpreting the scene shall be maximized and which set aside at any particular time.

This formulation reevaluates the normative dimension of world politics. From their bracketed, marginal position in realist theory, values, ethics, and morality now emerge as

significant parallel discourses, the return of the repressed. Normative discourse has its own important strategic implications, depending on the actors, the situation, and number of people who believe it to be important.

Normative discourse exists in the mind in schema form, to use the vocabulary of contemporary psychology. Schemata are internal cognitive frames that are embedded in people's minds. As traces of past experience, they provide guides to future action, helping actors interpret environmental cues, framing current issues of peace and war within a particular context of previously learned meaning. The cognitive process begins when initial cues from the environment stimulate or prime the actors to recall a particular schema. The schema frames events in a particular structure of perception and interpretation that leads to specific policies, decisions, and actions. Sound strategic analysis recognizes the critical importance of such cognitive processes, and of alternative cognitive schemata, in the heuristics of decision making.

JUST WAR

The doctrine of just war is a clear example of an alternative cognitive schema at work in the formulation of foreign policy. Just war doctrine provides a different schema or framework to structure the global struggle for power and the massive violence that goes with it, indexing a complex network of related narratives. Public speakers articulate and evoke these narratives in public discourse to reflect and shape public consciousness of political issues. They frame these issues to give them a particular intention and meaning, sense and direction, goal and purpose.

Just war has deep and broad historical roots. Some of its sources lie in the work of non-Western scholars, for example the classic Islamic scholar Shaybani. Western origins include the classical churchmen and lawyers, whose Latin words index many of the terms in contemporary usage (see Beer 1987, 1981). The doctrine of the just war has two major branches: (1) justification for going to war, *jus ad bellum*; and (2) justifiable acts in wartime, *jus in bello*. The justification for going to war, *jus ad bellum*, in turn depends on four principal elements: (a) proper authority; (b) just cause; (c) right intent; (d) peaceful end (Johnson, 1975:26). Once war actually begins, international law helps define its limits. Contemporary limits on warfighting violence, articulated through the doctrine of *jus in bello*, include two major elements: (a) proportionality and (b) discrimination (Johnson, 1975:26). Despite claims of military necessity, the doctrine of *jus in bello* helps us say whether the means are appropriate to the ends.

Modern proponents of just war suggest that it serves as a set of international norms or rules that are part of the prevailing international legal and ethical regime. Yet the political mechanisms through which just war theory lives in the real world have not been well developed. For just war theory to be politically effective, actors must bring the theory to the concrete level of politics. International decision makers and attentive international publics must have a material interest in promoting it, believe that it is important, be well informed about it, and attempt to apply it in specific international situations.

This happens in policy discourse. Proponents and opponents of particular policies related to peace or war use elements of just war doctrine to support their own policy positions and attack those of political opponents. The motivation to use just war doctrine comes not only from the abstract, general desire to rein in international violence, but also as part of the rhetorical weaponry of policy argument.

The rhetorical use of just war is talk, but it is also more than that. One can never be certain that words accurately reflect the real thoughts of the speakers, nor that all important motivations for action are spoken; yet, one can safely assume that public rhetoric reflects what is in somebody's mind. Speakers would not say the words if they did not believe that an audience would properly receive and appreciate them. Political actors speak theory to maintain and mobilize support, to articulate and refresh the beliefs of supporters, to neutralize or convert opponents, to construct and dissolve domestic and international coalitions.

THE GULF WAR DEBATE

Between January 10-12, 1991, the United States Congress conducted the most extensive public peace/war debate in American history. Most members of the House and the Senate spoke for the record. All of this is in a compact body of text that is self-contained and locally accessible.

Preliminary investigation has revealed an outline of how the speakers used arguments asserting claims and counter-claims that were traceable back to the elements of the *jus ad bellum*. For example, one facet of the debate concerned the proper authority of the President to undertake the war and the role that Congress should play in that decision. Senator George Mitchell (D-ME) succinctly described the conflict between Presidential and congressional authority (ll. 104 - 109).¹ On the one hand, he noted the President's valid claim to authority. "The Constitution designates the President as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces," he said. "With that designation comes the authority to direct the deployment of those forces." On the other hand, he advanced a counter-claim, limiting Presidential authority. "The Constitution also grants to the Congress," he said, "the authority to raise and support armies and to declare war."

The proper authority of the United Nations was also important. Senator Leahy (D-VT) noted (ll. 554 -557) that "President Bush's leadership in securing a United Nations authorization of the use of force if necessary to compel Iraq to leave Kuwait is a triumph for the role and authority of the United Nations in establishing collective security as a basis for international relations."

Some Senators challenged Saddam Hussein's proper authority to wage war. His claim hinged partly on the acceptance or rejection of his historical claim that Kuwait was properly a part of Iraq and, therefore within Iraq's sphere of sovereign internal action. Senator Moynihan (D-NY) (ll. 1141 - 1143) implicitly recognized Saddam's argument. "Iraq as such," he noted, "is

an artifact of the Treaty of Sèvres which ended the First World War with Turkey and the allies in 1920. The precise borders of Iraq were drawn in a tent in 1925 by a British colonial official."

Most United States Senators did not believe that Iraq had a reasonable historical claim to Kuwait. They asserted instead that Kuwait was an indeed a proper, independent sovereign state, and that, therefore, Iraq did not have proper authority under international law to use military force. Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) (Il. 40658 - 40664) asserted that "The principle of national sovereignty is the very basis of our independence and national survival. It follows from the rule of national sovereignty that legitimate governments have the right not to be disturbed by foreign aggression." By itself, this statement might have justified the proper authority of Iraq to use force within its sovereign borders, including Kuwait. Senator Helms, however," explicitly rejected this claim when he asserted Kuwaiti sovereignty. "These principles are of particular importance to the United States," he said, "when the victim whose sovereignty is violated is a country such as Kuwait, which has a key role in economic and diplomatic relationships with the United States."

Iraq's lack of fundamental democratic processes also raised the question of Saddam's own legitimacy as leader, further undermining his claim of proper authority. This issue, however, was complicated by Kuwait's own lack of the political, economic, and social freedoms that Americans took for granted. Senator Conrad (D-ND) did not favor military intervention. He tried to lighten the challenge to Iraq's proper authority (Il. 27509 - 27514) by claiming that "the sovereignty of Kuwait is a secondary issue. A well-crafted compromise can restore Kuwaiti independence. Freedom, at least as Americans understand it," he continued, "is not an issue in

the Gulf. Americans serving there aren't free to observe their religious holidays nor enjoy their favorite beverages."

The questions of just cause and right intent hinged partly on resolution of the prior issue of proper authority. As we have noted, Saddam's argument rested on his reading of the history of the British Empire. If Saddam did not have proper authority or just cause, as United States and allied decision-makers insisted, the legitimacy of the United States' *casus bellum* was stronger. It was also clear that Americans and their allies had just cause and right intent because the United States effort was part of a collective self-defense project legitimated by the United Nations Charter. Alleged Iraqi human rights violations further strengthened the Allied case.

Similarly, the question of peaceful end also depended on whether one interpreted the conflict in a short-term peacekeeping frame or a longer term imperialist one. Senator Robert Dole (R-KS) (37475 - 37478) strongly asserted the peaceful end of American policy. "I have implored the President, who also has been there in World War II, that what we are attempting to do in the Congress of the United States is to strengthen his hand for peace, not to give him a license to see how fast we can become engaged in armed conflict." Senator Conrad (D-ND) (11. 27504 - 27507) challenged this interpretation of Allied motivation." "The sand that Saddam wants, and the oil under it, aren't worth the sacrifice," he said. " And there should be no mistake; the oil is what the war is about."

Important issues were also raised by the theory of *jus in bello*. Concerns of proportionality and discrimination centered on legitimate war aims, for example, embargo costs to the Iraqi population and the possible occupation of Baghdad. Other questions included uses of inhumane weapons--atomic, biological, chemical; distinctions between civilian and military targets; protection of the sick and wounded. One example of such concerns was expressed by Senator Wirth (D-CO) (ll. 17548 - 17554). "If force must be used," he urged, "we would be well advised to restrict offensive action to air attacks, using armored forces defensively to deter any attempt by Iraq to widen the conflict on the ground. We could, for example, assert the sovereignty of Kuwaiti air space quickly and without great casualty. Then any Iraqi attack on Kuwaiti-sanctioned aircraft in Kuwaiti air space would be dealt with immediately and decisively."

TALKING THEORY

The Gulf War debate was a war of words that came before the actual war. Realist concerns of power and efficient application of force were as substantial in the debate as they were later on the battlefield, yet post-realist ideas were also important. The debate clearly showed the significance of factors going well beyond the realist model-- non-national actors [legislators]; non-military actions [rhetoric]; ethics, law, and morality [just war]. The constraints of international competition and the discipline of self-control remained important in formulating strategy; at the same time, criticism and interpretation played crucial roles. During the Gulf War debate, political actors engaged in critical thinking as they debated just war doctrine. Just war

framed, justified, and interpreted the acts involved in fighting the war on the battlefield and in constructing the subsequent peace (see Vaux, 1992).

Just war doctrine is one of the important ways that political and scholarly actors construct contemporary collective meaning. Just war doctrine provides an ethical, normative frame to structure and limit massive violent actions. Speaking just war is part of how political actors go about creating both war and justice. Writing just war, and testing its existence in the real world, is an important scholarly contribution to public policy and political understanding. Our analysis illustrates how political actors use just war doctrine to supplement realism in foreign policy discourse. Actors accentuate or diminish different elements of just war doctrine to support and oppose the use of coercive force. Just war doctrine is not only part of the international and domestic struggle for power, but also a separate, independent theme in political discourse and culture that helps shape real world conflict and cooperation. At the same time, the speakers' use of just war categories feeds back into just war doctrine itself. Just war rests on a long historical tradition and is usually expounded in general, abstract terms. By grounding it in a specific, contemporary debate, scholars have a much better sense of its relevance and importance in a contemporary context. Just war analysis is not just an abstruse branch of public international law of war, but a dynamic part of collective political life.

Political debate in a democratic forum is part of a process of complex practical reasoning that articulates logics of competition (realism) and cooperation (just war). This process is explicitly normative, thoroughly strategic, and essentially symbolic. Just war is used as a

template for integrating interest and justice, for building alliances, domestic and foreign, and for instilling a bias toward the long view into decision making (in part by tending to slow down decision making, in part by implying that just acts are the most strategic in the long term as they produce stability, reduce domestic dissent, etc.). The just war schema also operates as a "moving category system," i.e. a basic device for sifting, organizing, and evaluating information and perspectives and particularly for doing so when they come from disparate (seemingly contrary, contested, or incommensurable) sources or discourses. Hence just war theory is not just a set of principles applied "from above" and fitting poorly on the realist practice of foreign policy decision making. It is instead, post-realism suggests, an integral part of the process.

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Francis a. Beer
Political Science Department
Box 333
University Of Colorado
Boulder CO 80309
303-442-0221
beer@spot.colorado.edu
<http://socsci@colorado.edu/~beerball/index.html>

Francis A. Beer is a professor of political science at the University of Colorado, Boulder. His books include *Integration and Disintegration in NATO: Processes of Alliance Cohesion and Prospects for Atlantic Community* and *Peace Against War: The Ecology of International Violence* as well as related monographs on *The Political Economy of Alliances* and *How Much War in History*. He has edited *Alliances: Latent War Communities in the Contemporary World* and coedited, with Robert Hariman, *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*. He has published articles in the *American Political Science Review*, *Atlantic Quarterly*, *International Interactions*, *International Organization*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, *Peace and Change*, *Peace and Conflict*, *Peace Psychology Review*, *Political Communication*, *Politics and the Life Sciences*, *Review of International Studies*, and *Social Epistemology*.

Robert Hariman

Department of Rhetoric and Communication Studies

Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa

robert.hariman@drake.edu

Robert Hariman is a professor of rhetoric and communication studies and Endowment Professor of the Humanities at Drake University. His journal publications include essays in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *Rhetorica*, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, and *Journal of Higher Education*. He is the author of *Political Style: The Artistry of Power*, editor of *Popular Trials: Rhetoric, Mass Media, and the Law* and coeditor, with Francis A. Beer, of *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*.

¹ Textual references are to line numbers in the electronic text of the congressional debate. Thanks to Claudia Dahlerus, Jared Haller, and Nicole Rosmarino for research assistance.