

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Part 1: Consensus & Collaboration

Essential Questions

1. What are they? What are the types of states and intergovernmental organisations?
2. Why? What for? What essential purposes do these states and intergovernmental organisations serve in the international arena? *[Value/Importance]*
3. What tools do states and intergovernmental organisations use to fulfill their goals and roles in the international arena? How effective are these tools? *[Power]*
4. How far? How are collective/global responsibilities distributed amongst states? *[Control/Resp]*
5. How far? How do the self-interests of states conflict with each other or with international organisations' goals? How are conflicts resolved and consensus reached? *[Conflict and Consensus]*

DEFINITIONS

(A) **International Relations (IR)** is a scholarly discipline which seeks to *understand* events. On the other hand, 'international relations' (not capitalised) is used to *describe* interactions (eg. war, trade, diplomacy and foreign policy) between:

- Sovereign states and
- International actors such as -
 - o Intergovernmental organisations (eg. UN, ASEAN, NATO)
 - o International legal bodies (eg. ICC, ICJ)

Other interchangeable terms are 'global politics', 'world politics' or 'international politics'.

Practically speaking, Multinational corporations and Non-governmental organisations (eg. Oxfam, Doctors without borders, Amnesty International) also have great influence in the international arena.

Theories of International Relations:

Realism	Liberalism
• Gained momentum in WW2 • States are seen to be insecure, _____ and power seeking • States live in the context of _____ -ie. absence of someone being in charge (often used analogy of there being 'no one to call' in an international emergency). • Political leaders are attempting to survive in a competitive environment and would not take actions which would make the state weak or vulnerable, and are even willing to use	• Seen to be the 'utopian' theory and the current world order post WW2 • Based on the moral argument that the right of the individual to life and liberty is the highest goal of the government, with powers being checked. • Anarchic nature of the international system is mitigated by _____ among the states via trade, and belief in the international system and norms • Self-interest of states is managed by international _____ and

violence to guarantee survival of their own state. • Most common IR theory used in the world of policy making	weighing of potential _____, such as the opportunity cost of missing out on peace (eg. gains from international trade, foreign aid)
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(B) **Statehood:** Accepted criteria of statehood is stated in the Montevideo Convention (1993), which stated that a state must possess (1) a permanent population, (2) a defined territory, (3) a government and (4) the capacity to conduct international relations.

- The criteria of statehood are contentious and individual states apply their own judgment based on international norms and perceptions of self-interest.
- The recognition of statehood is used as a form of foreign policy (Eg. contention in the recognition of Palestine, Kosovo and Taiwan as states.)

(C) **Nations:** A nation is a group of people who see themselves as a _____ and coherent unit based on shared cultural or historical criteria (Rock, 2020). Nations are “imagined communities” that are bound together by notions of unity that can pivot around religion, ethnic identity, language, cultural practice and so forth.

- States $\neq$ Nations:
 - Nations are socially constructed units, not given by nature. Their existence, definition, and members can change dramatically based on circumstances. In contrast, a state is a political and legal entity.
 - The concept and practice of a nation ignores political boundaries such that a single nation may ‘spill over’ across multiple states. Some states may contain all or parts of multiple nations.
 - Also, not every nation has a state (e.g. Kurds; Roma; Palestine).
- **Nationalism:** Felt as individual perceptions of commonality (shared values, cultures, histories, even trauma).
- Is difficult to pin down. It cannot be prescribed (for instance by giving a new citizen an identification card) but is fostered through song, commemorative events, symbols and figureheads.

Writer George Eliot says, "Still the historian guides us rightly in urging us to dwell on the virtues of our ancestors with emulation, and to cherish our sense of a common descent as a bond of obligation. The eminence, the nobleness of a people depends on its capability of being stirred by memories, and of striving for what we call spiritual ends—ends which consist not in immediate material possession, but in the satisfaction of a great feeling that animates the collective body as with one soul. A people having the seed of worthiness in it must feel an answering thrill when it is adjourned by the deaths of its heroes who died to preserve its national existence; when it is reminded of its small beginning and gradual growth through past labours and struggles ... It is this living force of sentiment in common which makes a national consciousness"

- Nationalism is prominently displayed during consequential events, such as the passing of a beloved figurehead.
- Despite this seeming indistinctness, nationalism can compel _____ action, such as national physical security. Citizens fight to defend their compatriots and way of life rather than the preservation of the states as a political entity.
 - Eg. Nationalism can explain (one of) the causes of the Ukraine Invasion, as well as why the Ukrainians have managed to mount such a heroic defense.

Renowned political scientist Francis Fukuyama observed: "Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that Ukraine did not have an identity separate from that of Russia and that the country would collapse immediately once his invasion began. Instead, Ukraine has resisted Russia tenaciously precisely because its citizens are loyal to the idea of an independent, liberal democratic Ukraine and do not want to live in a corrupt dictatorship imposed from without".

- **Nationalism vs Patriotism:** Nationalism and patriotism are related but distinct concepts which both involve love for and loyalty to one's country. Nationalism can be a more extreme form of patriotism, involving a strong belief in one's own nation and sometimes a desire to assert its dominance. Today, the term 'nationalism' is used primarily as a _____, with some pointing to it as the cause for the rise of illiberalism and even interstate conflicts.
 - Eg. Some leaders, like Donald Trump and Viktor Orban, have leveraged such sentiments to stoke resentment.

"Nationalism can be seen as 'a perception of national superiority and an orientation toward national dominance' (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989: 271)

Fukuyama observes, "Nationalists complain that liberalism has dissolved the bonds of the national community and replaced them with a global cosmopolitanism that cares about people in distant countries as much as it cares for fellow citizens".



Self-reflection: Take 1.5 mins to consider these questions

1. What does patriotism mean to you personally?
 - Is it pride in achievements? A sense of belonging?
2. Think of a specific moment when you felt the most connected to Singapore.
 - Was it during National Day? While travelling abroad? During a crisis?

Your thoughts [To be shared in seminar discussions]:

Further questions:

3. What aspects of Singapore do you genuinely appreciate?
 - Beyond the obvious, safety and efficiency, what factors resonate with you? Is it cultural diversity, opportunities, values, or something else uniquely Singaporean?
4. Where do you see tensions in your relationship with Singapore?
 - Are there aspects you wish were different? Policies you disagree with? How do you reconcile loving your country while being critical of certain aspects?
5. As a young Singaporean, what does your generation owe to the country? Conversely, what does the country owe your generation?



Food for thought: Questions to drive conceptual understanding

1. Should a love for one's country still be encouraged? (2009)
2. Discuss the claim that in the modern world, people should care more about international rather than national issues. (2013)
3. 'No cause is ever worth dying for.' Discuss. (2015)
4. 'In the global village in which we inhabit, there is no justification for national boundaries.' How far do you agree? (2018)

Types of states

Please note that categorisation, as declared or proclaimed by academia or countries, is usually motivated by policy and agenda. There is no consensus on the various types of categorisations; they serve as convenient labels for you to understand the dynamics at play in a complex international arena.

(A) Great, emerging, developing powers (subjective criterion)

Academic RO Keohane argued that "A great power is a state whose leaders consider that it can alone exercise a large, perhaps decisive, impact on the international system; a secondary power is a state whose leaders consider that it can exercise some impact, although never in itself decisive, on that system; a middle power is a state whose leaders consider that it cannot act alone effectively but may be able to have a systematic impact in a small group or through an international institution; a small power is a state whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system."

- **Superpowers:** state which possesses extraordinary economic and/or military might, and general influence (technological, cultural, diplomatic) far superior than others

The Next Global Superpower Isn't Who You Think

By Ian Bremmer, the president of Eurasia Group and GZERO Media.

We no longer have multidimensional superpowers (ie. countries with global power in every domain), but multiple world orders:

- Unipolar security order: US is still dominant, with Indo-Pacific allies flocking to US security umbrella in light of China's growing military capabilities, and Europe increasing dependence on US-led NATO with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While some countries have nuclear weapons, using them is 'tantamount to suicide'.
 - Multipolar economic order with increasing complexity: US and China are interdependent, with the EU being the world's largest common market and India rapidly growing.
 - (Emerging) Technological/Digital order: dominant actors would not be governments but technology companies. In the Ukraine-Russia war, Western tech companies came quickly to the rescue by fending off Russian cyberattacks and allowing leaders to communicate with frontline soldiers. Twitter enabled Trump to speak with his followers, which resulted in the Jan 6 insurrection on Capitol Hill.
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- **Great Powers**: 5 nations with permanent seats with veto power in the United Nations Security Council (ie. USA, China, United Kingdom, Russia and France)
 - The permanent 5 were all Allies in WW2 (and victors) and are all states with nuclear weapons.
 - **Emerging Powers** (eg. European Union, Brazil, India)
 - Influential in trade and diplomacy
 - **Developing Countries**
 - Less developed industrial base and lower Human Development Index (composite index of human expectancy, education, per capita income indicators) as measured by the World Trade Organisation.
 - Status is for countries to _____ for themselves and be recognised as such by other countries.
 - Controversially, China has always maintained that it is still a developing country.
 - This is despite it projecting itself into international affairs and has a large military. It still exhibits characteristics of a developing country, such as widespread pollution, high poverty, and an average GDP per capita.
 - It is a "hybrid superpower", combining both developing and developed country traits with a global clout.
 - Advantages of having a "developing country" status is having "special and differential" treatment in order to:
 - Receive technical assistance and increase trading opportunities
 - Preferential treatment under the climate framework
 - Leeway of longer transition period before the country is required to implement agreements (eg. protection of environment, protection of intellectual property rights) and right to restrict imports to protect local economy
 - **Least developed countries**: The WTO recognises 46 such states. They include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Gambia, Haiti, Myanmar, Rwanda and Yemen.
 - **Fragile states**: Where the central government is so weak that it has little practical control over its territory and there is non-provision of public services. Eg. Yemen, Somalia, Syria, South Sudan.



Food for thought: Recommended readings

Michael A. Peters, in *The emerging multipolar world order: A preliminary analysis* (2022):

One source reminds us that strictly speaking there is only one capitalist system that embraces the world and that since China admitted capitalism into the system, really, it is only a matter of style in the way it is constructed to meet national interests:

Currently there is no concrete ideological or intellectual competition between Russia, China and the US. All three are stuck within the paradigm of capitalism's political-economic framework and secular-liberalism intellectual foundations. They merely define these differently and aim to frame both in a manner best suited to their geopolitical interests.

The international order was largely a reflection of such a collection of industrial nation-states that built on the international colonial trade favoring western great powers. Slowly this arrangement has given way to a new international economic order centered on the rise of global corporations focused on the new digital technologies and renewable energy sources with the rise of a new global ruling elite who became the leaders of a transnational capitalist class (TCC). This process is not complete. It is fragmentary, largely led by the US, China and the EU, and by no means assured as it faces strong anti-globalist, strengthening nationalist and anti-market forces both domestically and internationally.

The older nation states-based elites who controlled the liberal world order established at the end of WWII have been increasingly replaced by a new global elite on the one hand and an older-styled liberal international world agency-based bureaucratic elite on the other. The latter, an elite based on a new social contract, seek to mediate in the conflicts among nation-states, especially between Global North and Global South, through a world architecture that reflects older-style liberal internationalist leanings supported by institutions set up at Bretton-Woods.

Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (tackling primacy of economics)

Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail* (exploring the origins of power, prosperity and poverty)

(B) Big and small countries (more objective criterion)

- **Big countries:** The five largest countries (by population) in the world are China, India, the United States, Indonesia, and Brazil.
 - Larger states have greater advantages as they can leverage economies of scale for cheaper production of public goods, defense spending against foreign

- aggression and greater economic productivity.
- However, they also face challenges in terms of greater diversity of preferences, culture, language and identity (Alberto, 2003).
- **Small States:** The World Bank defines small states as countries with a population of 1.5 million or less. Other attributes of small states include having a small _____ or small _____ (less than \$2.5 billion). However, even when using absolute values, the 'smallness' is informed by the size of other states.
 - Examples of small states: Bahamas, Bhutan, Brunei, Dominica, Estonia, Fiji, Gambia, Iceland, Maldives, Qatar, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu etc...
 - Due to their small population and economic base, these countries are particularly vulnerable to exogenous shocks such as economic shocks, natural disasters, and climate change.
 - In 1992, Singapore's ambassador to the UN, Mr Chew Tai Soo, took the initiative to establish the Forum of Small State (FOSS). It is now an important platform for high-level dialogue on Small States' special development needs. The FOSS has 108 members, representing a majority of membership of the UN.



Self-reflection: Take 1.5 mins to consider these questions

Singapore is often said to 'punch above its weight' in the international arena, hosting major events like F1 and the Trump-Kim Summit. Do small countries like Singapore really have a powerful voice in the world?

1. What does 'punching above its weight' actually mean? Is it a loaded term with negative connotations?
 - Does 'weight' refer to population, land size, natural resources or something else?

Your thoughts [To be shared in seminar discussions]:

Further questions:

2. What are the unique circumstances which enable Singapore to 'punch above its weight'? What role does IR play in our success?
3. How does Singapore establish soft power?
4. Is this narrative still relevant and helpful for Singapore? How can national ambition be balanced with realistic limitations?



Recommended Readings

David Vital, *The Inequality of States — a Study of the Small Power in International Relations*

"It is a combination of size, material resources, economic development, geographical location, and military might which determines the extent to

	which a smaller state enjoys the capacity to 'perform as a resistant rather than vulnerable and active rather than a passive member of the international community'. <i>Small States In a Big World: Size Is Not Destiny (Tommy Koh, 2022)</i>
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Can small countries have a significant voice in world affairs? (2004)

With astute _____ and a _____ foreign policy direction, small countries would be in a better position to level the playing field in the global arena to project a significant voice.

1. Admittedly, small countries would be at a disadvantage in a multi-polar world where there is _____ over the United Nations Security Council by the great powers.
 - a. Eg. Washington often criticises China for using its "sheer size and muscle" to push around smaller nations in the South China Sea (eleven-dash line territorial claims). It is looking to build artificial islands to house ports and fuel storage depots so as to project power in the maritime heart of SEA.
2. Small countries can exponentially increase their _____ power and strategic disposition (relative to larger nations) by cultivating _____ with other small states. Small nations can consolidate their resources, conduct foreign affairs in tandem and coordinate their responses in order to strengthen their standing, and larger nations would have to contend with a political or economic bloc with increased clout.
 - a. Eg. According to Professor Tommy Koh, the bargaining power of FOSS allowed small states like Ireland to secure enough votes to win one of the non-permanent seats on the UN Security Council for 2021/2022.
 - b. Eg. Bloc of Baltic States, comprising Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, regularly holds joint defence exercises to deter Russian aggression. These small nations have the past traumatic experience of Soviet occupation and face a common danger in the form of an increasingly irredentist Putin administration.
3. Smaller countries can also forge national _____ with larger nations, with which they have similar geopolitical interests, to conduct relations on a more equal footing.
 - a. Eg. North Atlantic Treaty organisation which consists of small countries like Luxembourg (one of smallest countries in Europe) and aforementioned Baltic states, as well as giants like the UK and US. NATO members come together to discuss political and security issues and make collective decisions by consensus.
 - b. Eg. Five Power Defence Agreement strategic alliance between Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Malaysia and Singapore in order to maintain security and right of passage in the Straits of Malacca. Parties hold joint naval exercises, and have high arms sales between each other. Due to shared economic interests and historic Commonwealth ties, the alliance was formed.
4. Smaller countries can also amass economic _____ or strategic strengths to gain advantages and economic independence from other countries.
 - a. Eg. Singapore within regional ASEAN. Being the most competitive economy in

the trading bloc, it leads policy formulation for economic initiatives such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area of 2011.

- b. Eg. Although the Netherlands is a relatively small country in Europe, it has grown to become a massive agricultural powerhouse.

Types of International governmental organisations (IGOs)

The term **international governmental organization (IGO)** refers to an entity created by treaty, involving two or more nations, to work in good faith, on issues of common interest.

(A) Virtually all IGOs are intergovernmental

- An IGO usually has a legislative body which creates legal acts (decisions, resolutions or directives) which can bind the IGO.
- International government organisations do not rule over states. Most of these legislative acts do not supersede national law (except the EU). This means that their power rests with governments (the member states) and not with the IGO.
 - Such IGOs are heavily dependent on the will of their member states, as initiatives are dependent on _____-regulation and _____ operations of its members.
- IGOs are beneficial as they provide a forum for discussion, a platform to share information to enhance transparency and facilitate issue linkages in order to facilitate cooperation.
- However, IGOs are also criticised for lacking realism, especially in their texts of charter and constitutions.
 - The pursuit of verbal consensus replaces real discussion of problems and give-and-take of vested interests, concealing that in fact, no real agreement has been reached.
 - The constitution merely sets forth paragraphs of resolutions which sets basic principles or truisms which are easy to subscribe to without follow-up on their implementation.

Each IGO is unique, with different political, historical and geographical considerations shaping their goals and how they operate:

Case Study 1: United Nations

Background: The most important global intergovernmental organisation, established post WW2 in 1945 with the principal aim to ensure peace and security through international cooperation and collective measures. As of 2023, it has 193 member states.

Important characteristics:

- Delegates of all member states meet once a year during the General Assembly to discuss pertinent issues of world politics and vote on non-binding resolutions.
- Arguably panders to the _____ to get members on board. This makes milestones easily achievable and less impactful for altruistic goals. World leaders can make self-congratulatory claims without achieving anything.

Eg. UN Expert, Olivier De Schutter, Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, published a report in 2020 that eradication of poverty is now a fading dream. It says the UN's 2030 Agenda to eradicate poverty through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relies too much on a poverty line set so low by the World Bank that it allows governments to claim progress where there is none. It criticises the way governments have banked on economic growth to lift people out of poverty. Growth alone, without far more robust redistribution of wealth, would fail to effectively tackle poverty. It does not take into account the environmental degradation associated with economic growth, or the impacts of climate change on poverty itself".

Case Study 2: Power of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Countries)

Background: Consists of Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia (founding countries), Laos, Brunei, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam. Thanat Khoman, the former Thai foreign minister and one of ASEAN's founding fathers, lists 4 primary motivations behind the establishment of ASEAN:

- (1) prevention of external powers from exploiting the power vacuum after rapid decolonisation in the region,
- (2) opportunity for cooperation in the same geographical region,
- (3) stronger collective voice in addressing major global powers, and
- (4) cooperation and integration serving interests of all in ways individual efforts can never achieve.

Important characteristics:

- The ASEAN Charter focuses primarily on cultural and economic cooperation, rather than intervention into the domestic policies of its members.
- The 'ASEAN Way' encourages an informal, non-confrontationist approach towards member states to encourage _____ building ('mufakat') and _____ ('musyawarah') in order to enhance confidence among members.
 - Scholar Amitav Acharya associates the ASEAN way with "a high degree of discreteness, informality, pragmatism, expediency, consensus building, and nonconfrontational bargaining styles, which are often contrasted with the adversarial posturing and legalistic decision-making procedures in Western

multi-lateral negotiations”.

- Respecting each other's territory (the principle of non-interference) and sovereignty is one of the key ideals.

Eg. ASEAN's greatest contributions are peace, prosperity and geopolitical stability for Southeast Asia, which are not given in a region as diverse as SEA. The group's members encompass a bewildering kaleidoscope of languages, religions and traditions. This approach has facilitated the persistent economic and political engagement of regimes like Myanmar's military junta, preventing isolation from hardening their positions. ASEAN organises more than 1000 meetings annually which touch on virtually every topic, from trade, to tourism, and from healthcare to the environment.

Eg. ASEAN embraced a policy of non-intervention. While there have been minor skirmishes between neighbouring countries, they have fizzled out quickly, reflecting ASEAN's facility for conflict management and quiet diplomacy (contrasting sensational economic sanctions or harsh rhetoric). It has been highly effective in defusing potentially explosive situations such as the Thai-Cambodia border dispute and the dispute over Sabah between Malaysia and the Philippines.

Eg. While ASEAN has been very successful in coordinating a regional public health response for SARS and H1N1, it is a lot more cautious about criticising the domestic affairs of its members, such as the approach towards dealing with the transboundary haze. As of 2014, the members have all ratified the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution Agreement, but the treaty has failed to prevent the return of the haze. It is vague, and lacks enforcement mechanisms to hold perpetrators of the haze (with Indonesia being the primary haze producing party) accountable. Furthermore, the ASEAN way encourages members to act in their own self-interest rather than regional interests. The close relationships between the key polluting corporations and political elites also hinders change.

- In 2014, Singapore enacted the Transboundary Haze Pollution Act to penalise companies which contribute to cross-boundary emissions.

There are other IGOs in specific regions, such as the Arab League and the African Union (AU). These often emulate elements of the European Union, but none (as yet) feature supranational powers.

Other IGOs are neither geographically limited nor limited to a single issue:

- They can be specialised: Interpol, BRICs, NATO
- The Commonwealth of Nations: an organisation whose membership is restricted to former colonies of the United Kingdom.

(B) If an IGO is not intergovernmental, it would be in the rare category of 'supranational'.

To have supranational powers means that an organisation is able to govern its members and have a degree of independence from its member states.

- The only clear example of such a major organisation is the European Union (EU). For that reason, it is often described as *sui generis*, or 'unique' in its own right. It has a common market, joint border controls, and a supreme court.
- This delegation of power is not without controversies, and there is desire to weaken or dissolve the EU so that more power returns to the states (Eg. 2016 Brexit).

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AND EFFECTIVENESS

Foreign policy: state preferences between domestic and international considerations

Interests of local state governments

Duty to its people:

- Protection right to self-determination, independence and sovereignty of the nation
- Ensure security against foreign and environmental threats
- Accumulation of resources and territorial protection
- Economic management
- Improve living standards and quality of life (health and education)
- Maintain social stability
- Build a national identity through preservation and encouragement of local traditions
- Advocate and progress towards fairness and justice

Other self-interests of politicians:

- Secure re-election through populist policies
- Establish power through consolidation of economic and military power

We generally expect countries to collaborate due to the concept of shared fundamental values and shared fate, which necessitates common security and collective action.

- Eg. 4 important goals of the United Nations: Maintain international peace and security, protect human rights, deliver humanitarian aid and support sustainable development and climate change
- Eg. Climate change, terrorism, biological and digital (cybersecurity) viruses, proliferation of WMD (weapons of mass destruction), space rocks, management of global economy.

Yet, this is often not reality. It is commonly understood that to understand a state's foreign policy preferences, we need to take into account BOTH its domestic and international considerations.



Food for thought: Question to drive conceptual understanding

Discuss the extent to which global and national interests can be balanced.
(2001)

Why do states work together? Can they work together?

(A) States are motivated to work together for these various reasons:

- Shared quality of life in an interconnected world: Environmental problems, viruses, terrorism and economic crises can easily spread across borders. Governments might be motivated to work together to contain or prevent problems before they spill into their own backyard.

- Governments need to collaborate to harmonise counter measures in order to develop effective solutions against malicious agents like terrorists and non-complying transnational companies. Such actors have become very mobile with travel afforded by globalisation.
- Mutual benefit in economy and security cooperation: Trade deals and security arrangements usually offer preferential treatment which helps both parties.
- National reputation on the global stage: Some countries' national identity involve been seen as global champions of certain political and ethical values (eg. democracy and human rights). They need to put their money where their mouth is to boost or maintain their reputation and soft power.
- Desire to correct historical injustices: There have been growing calls for richer nations, especially those who have unjustly enriched themselves through colonialism or irresponsible actions to step up to hold themselves accountable and to assist less well-off countries. *Eg. Common But Differentiated Responsibility under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1970 UNESCO for Return and Restitution*
- Respect for international law: Fulfilment of legal obligations is needed so as not to undermine the credibility of the international rules-based system which the state itself benefits from, especially smaller states.

	Food for thought Channel News Asia, <i>More attempts by countries to 'weaponise economic interdependencies': PM Wong</i> Countries are identifying 'potential choke points' as leverage, all in the name of security and resilience. But, the more one country does this... it incentivises others to find alternative solutions and sources. Having good relations is not "just a matter of being friendly, saying polite words, handshakes and hugs". Having good relations means "building on substance". Singapore must have relevance, offer something to our partners and identify shared interests to collaborate on. Singapore can add value by being an "effective interlocutor", with PM Wong noting the country's reputation as an "honest broker". He stated that people trust Singapore to facilitate conversations, which is more important today in a world with growing tensions. Consider constructivism in international relations, which is social theory which emphasises the role of ideas, norms and identities in shaping state behaviour and the international system, rather than solely relying on material factors like power and self-interest. For instance, reflect on: • Switzerland's commitment to peacekeeping is rooted in its long-standing policy of neutrality. It has been sending unarmed military observers and liaison officers to UN peacekeeping operations around the world since 1990. • Foreign Prime Minister Vivian Balakrishnan reiterated at the Kent Ridge Ministerial Forum 2024 that Singapore's foreign policy approach is not to be neutral, but to act in a principled and consistent way based on long-term national
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	interests. He stated that “We do not take sides. We uphold principles”, and that Singapore has to be a credible, reliable and predictable partner to all. Given that we have a fundamental set of vulnerabilities, we have to be a consistent stalwart advocate for rules-based world order and international law. He gave examples where Singapore has called out violations of international law, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2023, Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia in 1978 and the US intervention in Grenada in 1983.
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(B) However, in reality, there are many obstacles to countries working together, let alone having shared and equal responsibility against common problems. Ideals espoused by nations often fail to stand up to scrutiny against more practical considerations:

- Resource constraints: Smaller and weaker states have limited resources and expertise, which can hamper ability to contribute to international efforts. World-wide scale of undertaking, gulf between ambition and means, and the inability to define modest objectives within reasonable time limits, contribute to doubt whether in the long run, the objectives stated can be achieved.
- Domestic political considerations dominate the discussion: Given scarcity of resources and the local government’s short-term interest of appealing to the electorate, countries can be hesitant to commit resources or make sacrifices which do not benefit them immediately or directly.
- Self-interests: Politicians often recognise what they should do to remain relevant and viable in the geopolitical quagmire of a chaotic world, and have no trouble doing business with states which can confer advantages despite them not complying with international norms.
- Countries feel the impact of global problems to varying degrees, and thus might have different levels of vested interests in addressing the problem: It is difficult to get buy-in when the problem is too remote to be felt by some countries. This makes it difficult to establish common ground for action to be taken, as well as efforts to be committed for sustainable and concrete changes to happen.
- Ideological differences: There are different means to counter issues (softer approach of sharing of information, training of personnel, to more hardline approach like direct intervention) which not all countries can agree on.
- Lack of trust: As a result of historical conflicts, ideological differences and perceived unfairness in previous collaborations, countries may lack trust in each other or the international institutional mechanisms.
- Nationalism and sovereignty concerns: Countries might be hesitant to share information or to cede decision-making power over their laws to deal with an international problem, as it can be seen as an erosion of control.

Case studies

- Eg. When it was time to fight a common enemy, COVID-19, EU, US, UK, India and China all restricted the export of protective gear and medical equipment. This was

followed by vaccine nationalism and vaccine diplomacy, with developed nations leveraging their stock of vaccines as bargaining chips with poorer nations.

- Eg. In May 2022, 5 months after the Ukraine war, 35 nations had resorted to food protectionism. Argentina blocked exports of soybean meal and oil. Egypt and India banned exports of wheat. Malaysia barred the export of chickens to Singapore, and Indonesia temporarily banned the export of palm oil.
- Eg. Prior to the Ukraine war, Russia and Ukraine accounted for a third of the global exports of fertilisers made from nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Moscow would block exports of fertilisers to damp down surging prices at home, confirming that when confronted with an existential crisis, nations behave in their own best interests.
- Eg. As Moscow cut off fertiliser supplies to geopolitical opponents and non-cooperative client states, Washington and its allies had to resort to 'friend-shoring' (ie. supply chains and ecosystems associated with strategic commodities to be ring-fenced within the safe and geographical confines of trusted allies and partners). Brazil was then buying a quarter of Russia's fertiliser exports and beginning to stockpile them in anticipation of future sanctions. Hence, Washington turned to its stalwart ally, Canada, to increase potash production. In 2022, Canadian manufacturer Nutrien Ltd, boosted potash production from 1 million to 15 million tonnes. The supply was used to satisfy the US and its allies, and provided Brazil with an alternative to Brazil supplies.



Food for thought: Readings to drive conceptual understanding

A.C Grayling sums things up simply with 'Grayling's Law':

"Anything that CAN be done WILL be done if it brings advantage or profit to those who do it. What CAN be done will NOT be done if it brings costs, economic or otherwise, to those who can stop it."

Recommended reading: For the Good of the World -Is Global Agreement on Global Challenges Possible (A.C. Grayling, 2022)

Professor Alejandro Reyes, a Senior Fellow at the Centre on Contemporary China and the World (CCCW), The University of Hong Kong says:

"We are in a time of performative diplomacy in which countries are taking decisions or asserting policies that are not necessarily in their own national interest but are designed to cater to, satisfy or signal to a particular group or a political base that the leadership is taking action on a domestic priority or cause. The death of expertise – not just a trend in the US and the West – is really about the eclipse, maybe not all the time, of evidence-based policy making by the geopolitics of emotion, the playing to a gallery, often for short-term political ends. The policy's effectiveness may not even matter; it is the mere delivery that is important."

Trump's tariffs are more about demonstrating resolve and taking some kind of dramatic punitive action than they are about achieving policy objectives. In China's case, its aggressive actions in the South China Sea are as much about

	<i>rallying the citizen support as they are about asserting sovereignty or securing access to possible sources of energy.</i> <i>A broader context of global geopolitics of course is the China-US rivalry. In a world of diplomatic performance over substance, the result is a high-stress, high-stakes battle for hearts and minds, for countries in the middle to choose a team, for partners and allies to fall in line.”</i> <i>Recommended reading: China-US Relations and the Emerging Multipolar World Order (Professor Alejandro Reyes)</i>
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	Consolidation and Review: Examine the questions below and think about how the concepts of ‘interest/value’ as well as ‘control and responsibility’ apply to them
	Discuss the view that all countries have an equal responsibility to counter terrorism. (2018) ‘Works of art which have been removed from their country of origin should be returned.’ Discuss. (2018) How far should countries have relations with others whose human rights record is poor? (2019) In times of economic hardship, should a country still be expected to provide financial or material aid to others? (2014)

Worked Example: Discuss the view that all countries have an equal responsibility to counter terrorism. (2018)
<u>Arguments for equal responsibility:</u> • Shared quality of life in an interconnected world: Terrorism and economic crises can easily spread across borders. Governments might be motivated to work together to contain or prevent problems before they spill into their own backyard. • Governments need to collaborate to harmonise counter measures in order to develop effective solutions against terrorists. Terrorist groups recruit fighters from all over the world, and also have transnational links. Eg. Truck bomb which killed 21 people in Tunisia had links to al-Qaeda and was planned in a Belgian town. Another ISIS group which planned an attack on Marina Bay Sands was based in Batam, and its plans were foiled due to coordination between Indonesian and Singapore security

agencies.

Arguments recognising limitations to equal responsibility:

- **Domestic political considerations dominate the discussion:** Not many countries would want to be mired in the backwaters of Afghanistan, like the US and its ally, the UK, to fight the Taliban, which claimed responsibility for the horrific 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York. A study by the Pew Global Attitudes Project showed that even opinion in the UK eventually shifted, as the majority of the British wanted their soldiers to pull back military involvement, despite commitment to fighting terror.
- **Ideological differences:** Eg. Different methods of dealing with ex-ISIS sympathisers – some countries stripped such ISIS sympathisers of their nationalities while others barred the adult sympathisers but allowed their spouses and/or offspring to return. Laxer countries may be criticised for not bearing equal responsibility.

How do states work together to make the world a better place? Is it effective?

“Humanitarian aid is designed to save lives and alleviate suffering during and in the immediate aftermath of emergencies, whereas development aid responds to ongoing structural issues, particularly systemic poverty, that may hinder economic, institutional and social development in any given society, and assists in building capacity to ensure resilient communities and sustainable livelihoods.” -Humanitarian Coalition

Types of foreign aid

(A) Disbursements/Transfer of money or resources

A voluntary transfer of resources from one country to another, in the form of food, money, subsidies and other resources.

Benefits of disbursements/transfers:

- In emergency situations such as natural disasters and famines, such direct aid is necessary to stave off starvation, when local pipeline for necessities cannot keep up with demand or shock in supply. It solves the immediate effects of the crisis. Aid can also act as a stop-gap measure to help countries in the short term, while they build up their capacity to achieve development in the long term.
- Such aid which is thoughtfully implemented can also be effective by acting as an incentive: The governments must fulfill specific goals in order to access installments of aid. This motivates them to work on projects that will in the long run deal with the underlying problems that lead to hunger in their country.
 - The Golden Thread narrative explains how foreign aid needs to be complemented with the right governance arrangement and institutions to effect real change. This includes the rule of law, governance transparency and an effective civil society.
 - Eg. The Kenyan government actively invests aid from the UK into its own people by rolling out reforms to increase accessibility of credit loans to businesses and

people.

- Countries that pursue a policy of conditional relations, such as tied-aid or economic packages, can make requests for the recipient country to fulfill.
 - Eg. Aid for North Korea was suspended due to its unwillingness to allow for nuclear weapons inspections.

Limitations and controversies about disbursements/transfers for foreign aid:

- Infrastructure and distribution network of the recipient country can be weak, such that the resources may not reach those in need.
 - Eg. In Asia after the Boxing Day tsunami, food and other necessities sent by foreign governments were left languishing in airports due to lack of means of distribution and coordination between the local authorities and the aid groups.
- Corruption where the local authorities take advantage of the largesse of foreign nations and aid groups to take a cut of the direct aid provided.
 - Eg. The World Food Programme was exposed to be ridden with corruption. 'Backstabbing for Beginners' is an expose by a UN official—Michael Soussan—who testified to the US government about the corruption that enriched the contractors involved in the Oil-for-Food programme scandal in Iraq in the years immediately after the 1st Gulf War.
 - Eg. The Belt and Road Initiative by China has been accused of creating wasteful 'white elephants', fuelling corruption and failing to live up to promises of bringing prosperity. Aid Data found more than a third of the projects to face such problems. A growing backlash has prompted countries like Malaysia and Tanzania to cancel BRI deals.
- There could be exploitation of the recipient country when the motive of the donor country is questionable or when the help comes with 'strings attached' in order to achieve its own economic objectives.
 - Eg. EU accused of making aid to African nations conditional on them curbing migration to Europe
 - Eg. Indian PM Narendra Modi once said "History has taught us that in the name of development partnerships, nations were forced into dependence partnerships. It gave rise to colonial and imperial rule. It gave rise to global power blocks."
 - Eg. One Aid Data study of Chinese state-owned entities' loans to foreign governments under the BRI deals found clauses that potentially allowed lenders to influence debtors' domestic and foreign policies.
 - Eg. The IISS pointed out that China has corralled several EU members to water down or block policies critical of China. Many nations that have shifted recognition from Taiwan to China in the past decade are BRI funding recipients. In SEA, Cambodia has consistently resisted condemnation of China's actions in the South China sea.
- Can engender a sense of reliance on the donor country by the recipient country, such that a 'crutch mentality' is developed. This undermines effective governance and creates dependency rather than self-sufficiency. Where aid is relied on as a long-term strategy, this impedes progress and reform.
 - Eg. Haiti's dependency on cheap US imports for more than 80% of its grain stock

- Foreign aid which is one-dimensional in nature in terms of providing funding or resources might only deal with the symptoms of the problem but not strike at the core of the problem, and therefore is ineffective in alleviating long-term issues.
- Supply of foreign aid can be unreliable, as it is often subjected to the economic situation and the priorities of the foreign governments. Disruptions prevent long-term planning that help these nations to plan their way out of the pit of poverty and its people out of hunger.

The Complete Story of Debt-Trap Diplomacy, Rahul Ajoti (The Geopolitics)

Brahma Chellaney, an Indian academic, came up with the term Debt-Trap Diplomacy in 2017.

- It is a term used to define a creditor country or establishment extending loans to a borrowing country in order to expand the lender's political leverage.
- This diplomacy involves providing loans with terms which are too onerous for borrowing states to may back, ultimately forcing them into accepting economic or political concessions.

Case Study: Did China begin its multi-billion Belt and Road Initiative as a master plan to trap poor and needy nations to rip off their resources?

Context: In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping promised various infrastructural projects such as building ports, railways and power stations in poor developing countries. According to Aid Data, 13 427 Chinese development projects worth \$847 billion are employed in 165 countries worldwide. Loans provided by financial institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and OECD offer bona fide loans with transparent terms, while loans offered by Chinese banks have clauses with early termination. Poor and developing countries usually lack alternatives to taking up Chinese loans due to their poor credit rating in the international financial system.

One faction has blamed China for using this strategy to **promote its geopolitical interests** in Asia and Africa by giving them huge loans and **acquiring the assets of the borrowing nations when they fail to pay.**

- The Chinese company acquired the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota as a result of the project not making enough money to sustain the economy and fiscal debt.
- Interestingly, while China accounted for only 10% of Sri Lanka's debt burden, Western media blamed it for the extensive problems, rather than the country's long-term economic mismanagement. One cannot deny the existence of propaganda around the 'China Debt Trap' which emerged as a powerful weapon of geopolitical strategy.

The other side, however, has portrayed China as an **excellent entrepreneur** who saw economic opportunity in providing loans to failing countries.

- China is the biggest creditor to 32 African nations. Despite their colossal debt, many still consider the Asian Giant their closest friend, as China is the biggest supporter in closing the infrastructure gap. China has also provided a moratorium to many countries, such as Chad, Sudan and Zambia.
- China has been strategic in choosing its borrowers, by stepping in at the most opportunistic moment. Most of the borrowing countries do not have good credit ratings and hence are ineligible to seek help from alternative finance. It also protected its interests by holding project assets as collateral. For instance, the Chinese Exim Bank, through the 'Resource Guarantee Infrastructure Financing', focused on mineral and

hydro-carbon rich African states to leverage the extraction of natural resources against defaults on loans. It extracted copper from Zambia, gold from Tanzania and oil & gas from Sudan.

- Rather than criticising and asking nations not to seek financial assistance from the Asian Giant, the US should counter China by providing a 'New International Financial Framework', where developed countries come together to support poor and developing countries.

(B) Transfer of expertise and advisory/collaboration:

Often seen as a better long-term alternative to continuous foreign aid:

- Can improve government systems for more effective administration. This in turn provides the foundation for a healthy economy and the people can then have steady jobs and a source of income which goes a long way in dealing with other social issues.
 - Eg. Rwanda since 1996 after the genocide, has undergone governmental reforms that focuses on strengthening civil society and civic participation, accomplished with the help of USAID (United States Agency for International Development). Correspondingly, the country's 'ease of business' rating by the World Bank has improved from a ranking of 143 to 58 in 2010.
- Training and infrastructure building will help the poor countries gain independence, and long-term livelihood options are more important in alleviating global hunger in the long run.
 - Eg. Before recent developments, Afghan government used the United States Agency for International Development to train more than 150,000 teachers and increase enrolment rates to schools to 60%
- Additionally, targeted transfers of expertise and technology are less susceptible to abuse by corrupt parties.

Limitations and controversies of transfer of expertise:

- Many aid programmes are being planned by coordinators who do not understand the local situation (Jeffery Sachs).
 - Many social problems like poverty, lack of healthcare and low literacy, economic crisis, war and civil conflict, or environmental issues are often multifactorial in nature, which can include entrenched corruption, incompetent governance, lack of education and deeply rooted cultural practices.
 - Eg. Ineffectiveness of foreign aid in addressing HIV epidemics due to lack of education
- For younger nations, the persistent presence of external actors is hazardous as it poses a threat to the legitimacy of their governments if local policy-making becomes more responsive to foreign demands rather than the preference and needs of their citizens (Koch & Weingart)

	Food for thought: Questions to drive conceptual understanding How effective are international efforts to ease the problem of global hunger? (2010) Foreign aid does not solve long term problems.' To what extent is this a fair viewpoint? (2018)
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SEMINAR ACTIVITY



Consider Singapore's Vietnamese Refugee Crisis Experience

Context:

- During the Vietnam War, Singapore, along with other Southeast Asian nations, faced an influx of Vietnamese refugees, known as "boat people."
- Singapore initially took a firm stance, using Operation Thunderstorm to deter refugees from landing, providing them with supplies and then turning them away.
- Later, Singapore agreed to serve as a temporary transit point for Vietnamese refugees, with the understanding that they would be resettled in third countries within 90 days. The Hawkins Road camp was established to house these refugees.
- A significant challenge arose when many of the promised resettlement countries failed to meet the 90-day deadline, leaving Singapore with a growing population of refugees.
- Social and logistical challenges emerged, with some refugees engaging in protests and acts of desperation to avoid repatriation.
- Consequently, Singapore adopted a policy of minimal engagement with the global refugee discourse, stating that it is not in a position to accept refugees due to its small size and limited resources.

Recommended Resources:

Singapore is Still Burdened by its Experience in the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis by Ricemedia
<https://biblioasia.nlb.gov.sg/vol-20/issue-3/oct-dec-2024/hawkins-road-refugee-camp/>

Interactive museum:
<https://vietnamesemuseum.org/our-roots/refugee-camps/singapore/>

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you evaluate Singapore's initial 'turn-away' policy morally?
2. What does this crisis reveal about Singapore's values and priorities?
3. If you were a policymaker in 1975, what would you have recommended?

4. How has this experience shaped Singapore's current refugee and immigration policies?
5. Does this fit with Singapore's self-image as a helpful neighbor?
 - How should international responsibility sharing work in practice?
 - What does Singapore owe the international community as a successful small state?
6. What would your generation have done differently? What role should social media and global connectivity play?

Your thoughts [To be shared in seminar discussions]: