## Understanding Theoretical Lenses – Answer Key

Please check your notes against this key to be sure you are identifying the most important information.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Term</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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| classical realism          | **Definition:** A belief that politics deals rationally with the possible and is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature; according to this belief, interest is defined as power; emphasizes the decisions of political leaders, diplomacy, and statecraft.  
**Examples:** Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*; studies of individual leaders and their decision making (for example, studies of George W. Bush or Saddam Hussein and their decisions prior to and during the war in Iraq). |
| structural (or neo-) realism | **Definition:** A belief that all action is grounded in the anarchic structure of the international system; there is no ultimate arbiter to settle disputes among states, and thus states must do what they can to protect their own power and security.  
**Examples:** Kenneth Waltz’s *Man, the State, and War* and *Theory of International Politics*; studies of different structures of the international system (such as the stability of the bipolar Cold War system compared with the multipolar system that existed prior to World War I). |
| hegemonic stability theory | **Definition:** The stability of the international system requires a single dominant state to articulate and enforce the rules of interaction among the most important members of the system.  
**Examples:** 1494–1580 Portugal  
1580–1688 Holland  
1688–1792 England  
1815–1914 Britain  
1945–1971 United States |
| security dilemma           | **Definition:** A situation in which, by striving to increase their own security, states make others feel less secure; defensive actions of states spur offensive responses.  
**Examples:** Europe on the eve of World War I. |
| **liberalism/idealism** | **Definition:** A theory of international relations that holds that regime type influences state behavior, and that international institutions can mitigate the conditions of international anarchy.  
**Examples:** Democratic peace thesis; Robert Keohane's discussion of international institutions. |
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| **collective security** | **Definition:** A system of states that join together and agree that 1) the security of one is the concern of all, and 2) there will be a collective response to any threat or breach of the peace.  
**Examples:** The North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| **legitimacy of international institutions** | **Definition:** The right to rule; a standard based on minimum moral acceptability, comparative benefits, and institutional integrity; the institution must be accountable, transparent, and open to criticism and revision from external civil society.  
**Examples:** Debates about reforming the United Nations Security Council or the World Bank. |
| **constructivism** | **Definition:** Theory of change in international politics that emphasizes how states perceive themselves and others.  
**Examples:** Alexander Wendt’s study of state identity. |
| **Marxism** | **Definition:** A class-based theory of international relations.  
**Examples:** The increasing concentration of wealth among the capitalist class and the wage stagnation (despite increasing productivity) of the working class; *The Communist Manifesto; Capital (Das Kapital)*, volume 1. |
| **historical materialism** | **Definition:** A view that history is defined or shaped by the material (or economic) basis of society; moreover, as the material basis of society changes, so does history. Key implication: those who control the forces of production control society.  
**Examples:** The industrial revolution that brought about the rise of mass production and consumption; the current changes in information technology; the “hydrocarbon era,” in which energy needs are met through the use of fossil fuels. |
| base and superstructure | **Definition:** In Marxist theory, the base includes the relations of production and the means of production, which shape the superstructure, while the superstructure includes broader aspects that influence society and legitimize the base, including education, ideology, the media, politics.  
**Examples:** Base: existing economic arrangements in society, such as which industries are wealthy and politically influential. Superstructure: prevailing capitalist ideologies. |
| capital accumulation | **Definition:** An element of Marx's theory of capitalism, capital accumulation occurs when the capitalist class (owners of the means of production) is increasingly able to increase the intensity of work, keeping the costs of production low and increasing efficiency.  
**Examples:** The development of large multinational corporations, and their increasing ability to achieve economies of scale, as well as increase worker productivity, without increasing wages. |