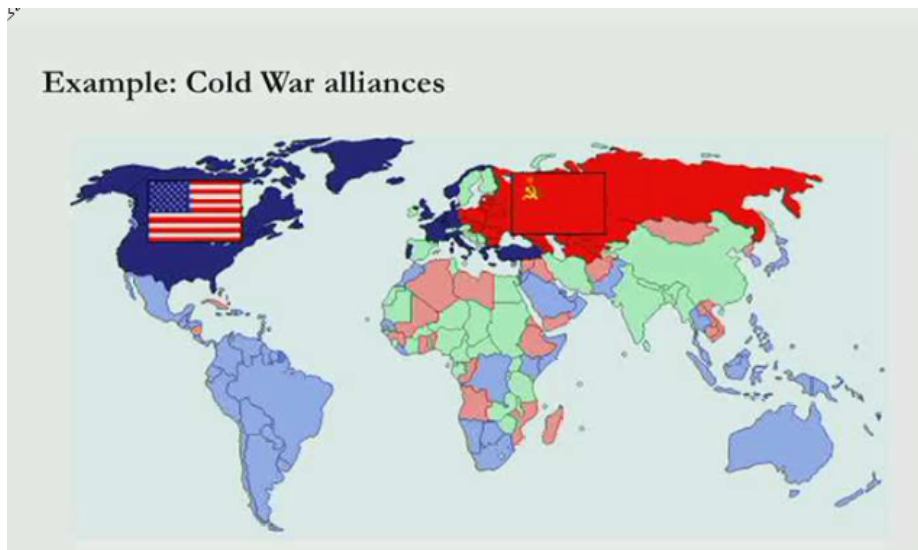**'Classical' realism**

Focus on **human nature**

- human lust for power → states' lust and competition for power in the system
- No strong international authority → competition and war between states.
- International politics = '**power politics**'.
- **Pessimistic** about the ability of humans to achieve peaceful progress in international politics; to think otherwise is naïve and 'idealist' e.g. formation of League of Nations criticised for naivety and idealism
- Clear **separation between 'domestic' and 'international' politics**
- Domestic sphere: morality, order, justice due to being organised by state
- International politics: no higher power, morality defined by what was in the 'national interest', not the interests of 'outsiders. Do whatever you need to do

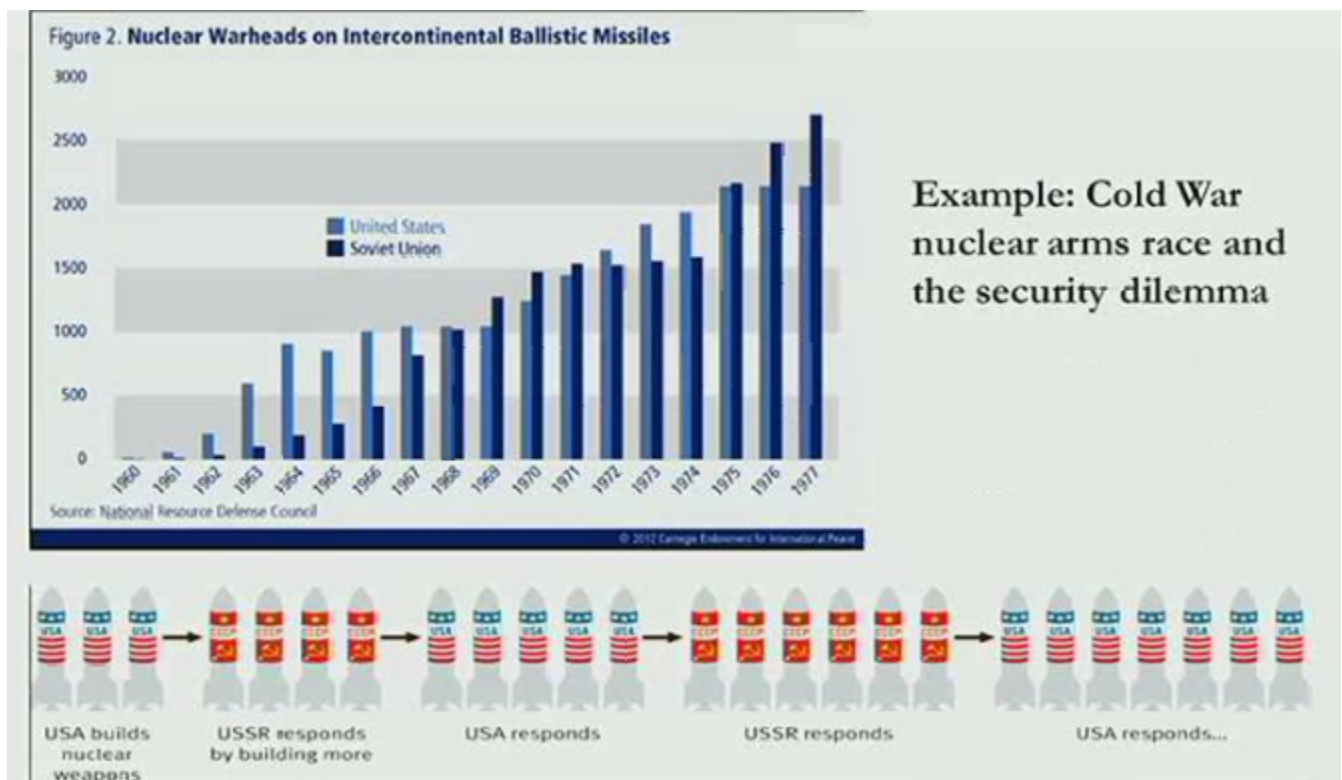**'Structural' or 'neo' realism**

- In 1979, Waltz put forward a more refined and 'scientific' form of realism → instead of focusing on human nature, he focused on the **structure of the international system**.

- **Sovereign states are the principal actors** in world politics ∴

  anarchical nature of the international system (no central authority or formal hierarchy) that determines the behaviour of states
- States = **rational actors**, who all want to '**survive**'
- Face an **uncertain** and potentially dangerous international environment
- **do not know the intentions, cannot trust**
- States cannot rely on any higher authority to provide order/provide for their security in the face of attack by another state ∴ '**self-help' system** of survival.
- Waltz, **all states are functionally the same** → rational actors

- The type of political system or ideology of state (i.e. democratic, capitalist, communist, fascist) doesn't matter for behaviour
- The dynamics of the international system depend on the **distribution of capabilities**. I.e. which state/s are the most powerful, or which states are gaining or losing power? → **relative power is very important.**
- Power is seen as a **zero-sum game**: your opponent's gain in power is your loss, and vice-versa.
- How is power measured?
  - **power is measured in terms of military capability**
  - Other forms of power (economic, resources, geography, population etc) are useful to the extent that they contribute to military power
- So, **how do states survive**? → two main ways states can act in order to enhance their security/survival.
  - Enhance their own power by **building up their military capability.**
  - Form (temporary) **alliances** with other states to **balance the power** of more powerful states - temporary since situation might change, can't trust anyone
- E.g. Cold War alliances

Example: Cold War alliances

The security dilemma

∴ In self-help system, **attempts to enhance your own security might actually undermine your security** and the security of the system.
E.g. Cold War nuclear arms race and the security dilemma

Figure 2. Nuclear Warheads on Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles

Example: Cold War nuclear arms race and the security dilemma

Impact and implications of realist theory for the international system

- States should always prepare for war
- They should maintain high levels of defence spending and operational readiness in case of attack.
- They should form temporary alliances to balance rising power.
- States should not fully trust other states
- i.e. should be wary of joining international organisations like the UN because it might create a 'false sense of security'.
- States should not be concerned about issues of morality in the international system
- i.e. Interventions in other countries to protect human rights could make the state vulnerable to attack and hence put their national interests and even survival at stake.