

Realism in International Relations

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Realism is the most dominant theory of international relations. According to realism, the states, work to increase their own power relative to the power of other states. Realism is a state centric theory of international relations and propounds that the primary aim of the states is self-preservation. Every state strives for power and it is the most powerful state that is able to outdo its competitors. Realism also views that moral behaviour makes states weak and that moral behaviours cannot guide foreign policy. Moral behaviour also does not allow the states to protect themselves.

Realism is the most popular theory in international politics. Realist theory is closely attached to the political theorists who emphasize on the negative part of human behaviour. According to these theorists, individuals are rational but self-centered beings and their prime objective is to always protect and maximize their self-interest. They are always in a state of competition with each other. Those who are powerful enough survive, whereas the weak, on the other hand are unable to protect themselves. In other words, the search for power and strength is the main motivational force behind an individual's conduct.

Though Realism as a theory in International relations has emerged after the 1930s, the concept of realism has its own ancient tradition. We find the concept of realism in the writings of several political thinkers such as Machiavelli, and Kautilya. As realism frequently draws on examples from the past, there is a great deal of emphasis on the idea that humans are essentially held hostage to repetitive patterns of behaviour determined by their nature. Central to that assumption is the view that human beings are egoistic and desire power.

Niccolo Machiavelli, an Italian philosopher wrote a famous book called "The Prince". This book was also considered as a guidebook which told that what a prince should actually be and the ways he should wield his power in order to gain and maintain his sway over his state. That means The Prince can rise in the interest of the state in humanitarian rituals and make immoral decisions if necessary.

Machiavelli also focused on how the basic human characteristics influence the security of the state. In The Prince, Machiavelli stressed that a leader's primary concern is to promote national security. In order to successfully perform this task, the leader needs to be alert and

cope effectively with internal as well as external threats to his rule; he needs to be a lion and a fox. Power (the Lion) and deception (the Fox) are crucial tools for the conduct of foreign policy. In Machiavelli's view, rulers obey the 'ethics of responsibility' rather than the conventional religious morality that guides the average citizen that is, they should be good when they can, but they must also be willing to use violence when necessary to guarantee the survival of the state.

Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' is also a great example for discussion the principles of statecraft, written in Sanskrit. According to him, the main goal of the king in terms of policy would be to increase the power of the state, to expand the empire, and to destroy the enemy. In addition, Kautilya's advice is that peace is much more desirable than war and the king will behave properly in victory or defeat.

For many practitioners within the academic discipline and in the international relations perceive the most influential model during the first quarter century of World War II as realism. According to them, this realism arose as a reaction to the perceived downfall of the policy appeasement (and idealism) that occurred between the 1920's and the 1930's.

According to realists, the international society was anarchical was ruled by individual nations that were all striving to maximize their own security and power. Since most nations were predisposed towards competition and conflict, cooperation in international relations was usually futile and elusive, even when countries across the world perceived the overall benefits of such arrangements.

The basic outlines of Realism are –

- International politics are anarchic.
- A sovereign state is a principal actor in international politics.
- The state is a rational unitary actor which acting under the consideration of its own national interest
- National security and Survival are the primary goals of the State.

Hans J. Morgenthau

Hans J. Morgenthau's 'Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace' is the finest book in the classical realist theory.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Hans Morgenthau (1948) In contrast to idealists who expected international tensions to be resolved through open negotiations marked by goodwill, Morgenthau set out an approach that emphasised power over morality. In Morgenthau's account, every political action is directed towards keeping, increasing or demonstrating power.

He gives principles of political realism. These are-

- Politics is governed by objective laws which have their root in human nature.
- The key to understanding international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power.
- The forms and nature of state power will vary in time, place and context but the concept of interest remains consistent.
- Universal moral principles do not guide state behaviour.
- Moral aspirations are specific to a particular nation; there is no universally agreed set of moral principles.

Hence in an overall view, realism describes international relations as a struggle for power among nations who seek to protect their own interests.

Realists also accept the state as an actor in the realm of international politics. States are always in search of maximizing their powers. States also have a sense of national interest. Realists believe that preserving the national interest can only be possible by having a strong state. A strong state can only be built through maximizing military strength.

Many new actors have emerged in the last fifty years, e.g., multinational corporations, terrorist organizations, transnational organizations (like the UN), and so on. However, despite the emergence of these new actors, states continue to function as dominant actors in international politics. The nature and degree of interference of such actors in the domestic and international affairs of the states is being determined by the states themselves. In other words, states are still powerful actors who control the challenges coming before them.

Besides, their military strength and their ability to use force against their own citizens gives them an edge over other actors.

Basic Assumptions of Realism

Hence realist theory focuses on the three key areas which also can be considered as three basic assumption of realism theory in international relations. These are-

Statism

According to realism, state is the main actor and sovereignty. The prime goal of a state is to assure its security.

In the domestic sphere, the problem of order and security can be solved. But outside of the state, in the international sphere among independent sovereign states, insecurity, danger, and threats are continuously exist. To them, in anarchy, every state competes with other states for power and security.

Survival

In this anarchy, the pre-eminent goal of every state is survival. Increasing power and assure security is the goal of a state but survival is the precondition to attaining this goal.

Self-Help

In the international system, there is an absence of central authority to counter the use of force by one state to another state. Security is always being realized through self-help so the possibility of war is always there.

Hence according to realist theory is that the nation-state is the principle actor in international relations. Other bodies exist, such as individuals and organisations, but their power is limited. Second, the state is a unitary actor. Realism suggests that all leaders, no matter what their political persuasion, recognise this as they attempt to manage their state's affairs in order to survive in a competitive environment. Hence for realists, the highest goal is the survival of the state, which explains why states actions are judged according to the ethics of responsibility rather than by moral principles