

REALISM

INTRODUCTION

NEED OF THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

We need theories of International Relations to:-

- a. Understand subject-matter of IR.
- b. Know important, less important and not important matter in IR.

Theories of IR also known as *approaches of IR*.

IMPORTANT APPROACHES OF IR

There are three main perspectives on International Relation and world Politics. These three are- Realism, Liberalism and Marxism. These three try to explain the main concepts and the theme of International Relations from the theoretical perspectives.

REALISM

Realism has been the dominant theory of world politics since the beginning of academic international relations.

All politicians or practioner of IR may have believe on any other theory. In practice, they believe and follow Realism (Realist Theory). According to Ainsley, “the name of theory can also be reason for its popularity.

Realism (or political realism) is a school of thought that explains international relations in terms of power. Power is often define as the ability to get another actors to do what it would not otherwise have done (or not to do what it would have done).

The exercise of power by states toward each other is sometimes called *Realpolitik*, or just *power politics*.

Realism is descriptive, prescriptive as well as analytical.

KEY THINKERS OF REALISMS

Thucydides (c. 430-406), Machiavelli (1532), Morgenthau (1948) – *classical realism*; Rousseau (c. 1750), Kenneth Waltz (1979), Mearsheimer (2001) – *Structural realism*; Zakaria (1998)

ASSUMPTIONS OF REALISM

Realism is based on following assumptions:-

- Human nature is *selfish*.
- Most important actors are *States*
- Causes of state behaviour is *Rational pursuit of self interest*
- Nature of international system is *anarchy*.

CORE ELEMENTS OF REALISM

In the works of key thinkers such as Thucydides and Kenneth Waltz, we identify three core elements of realism – ***Statism, Survival and Self-help.***

- 1) **STATISM:** It is the term given to the idea of the state as the legitimate representative of the collective will of the people. The legitimacy of the State enables the States to exercise authority within its domestic borders. Yet outside the boundaries of the state, realists argue that a condition of anarchy exists. Here, the concept of anarchy emphasize the point that the international realm is distinguished by the lack of a central authority rather than denoting complete chaos and lawlessness.

Realists argue that the basic structure of international politics is one of anarchy in that:

- Each of the independent sovereign states considers itself to be its own highest authority and does not recognize a higher power.
- First priority of leaders of each of the independent sovereign States is to ensure the survival of their States.
- All States wishes to maintain their existence. For example, Poland has loosen its existence four times in the past three centuries.

- 2) **SURVIVAL:** In International Politics, the most important goal for each state is survival. States struggle for power as to have security that is to survive. So, survival is held to be a precondition for attaining all other goals either to have war or alliance or treaty.

Waltz argues that states have security as their principal interest and therefore seek only the requisite amount of power to ensure their own survival.

Mearsheimer argues that the ultimate goal of all states is to achieve a hegemonic position in the International system.

- 3) **SELF-HELP:** According to realism, Self-Help refers to lack of global government. It means, each state actor is responsible for ensuring its own well-being and survival. In other words, States should not depend on other states or international institution, such as the United Nations, to ensure their own security.

In conclusion, realism views a State to strengthen its power capabilities by engaging in a military arms build up, etc, if the state feels threatened. But, this strategy may prove to be insufficient for a number of smaller States who feel threatened by a much larger state. Therefore, Realists considered '**the balance of power**' in order to the liberty of states.

The most common definition of '**the balance of power**' holds that – *if the survival of a state or a number of weaker States is threatened by a hegemonic state or a coalition of stronger states, they should join forces, establish a formal alliance.* **Cold War is the best example of the balance of power mechanism.**

CLASSIFICATION OF REALISM

Scholars believe that there is not one realism. Realism can be classified into a variety of distinct categories. The simplest distinction is a form of periodization that differentiates realism into following historical periods:

- I. Classical Realism
- II. Modern Realism
- III. Structural Realism (Neo-realism)
- IV. Neoclassical Realism

Note:- as per the SYLLABUS OF DU: B.A.(H) POLITICAL SCIENCE, 3rd SEM., we have to study – CLASSICAL REALISM and STRUCTURAL REALISM (NEO-REALISM)

I. CLASSICAL REALISM

Beginning: classical realism begins with *Thucydides' text* on **The Peloponnesian War** between two great powers in the ancient Greek World, Athens and Sparta and incorporating the ideas of classical Western political thinkers, and ends in twentieth century.

Firstly, Classical realism focus on 'human nature' especially.

THUCYDIDES: he concluded that:-

- International politics is driven by an endless struggle for power.
- The ***drive for power and the will to dominate*** are fundamental aspects of human nature.
- Justice, law, and society have no place or are circumscribed in the international politics.
- The behaviour of the state as ***a self-seeking egoist*** is merely a reflection of the characteristics of its citizens.
- It is human nature that explains ***why international politics is necessarily power politics***.
- Thucydides suggested that the logic of power politics has universal applicability. This view is also supported by later classical realists, Machiavelli and Morgenthau.

Limitation of realism to human nature only is also seen in the work of many realists, most famously in the work of – ***Hans J. Morgenthau***.

Classical realist argue that- *it is from the nature of man that the essential features of international politics, such as competition, fear, and war, can be explained*. Morgenthau notes, "Politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature." For both Thucydides and Morgenthau, the essential continuity of the power-seeking behaviour of states is rooted in the biological drives of human beings.

Secondly, classical realism is fundamentally about the struggle for belonging, a struggle between good and evil, a struggle that is always violent.

Third, classical realism sought to reconstruct an understanding on the basis of practice and historical circumstance.

Later classical realists were notably ***Machiavelli and Morgenthau***. Morgenthau's era witnessed many drives for more power and territory, such as, ***Nazi Germany and Czechoslovakia in 1939, and The Soviet Union and Hungary in 1956, many more***. These drives confirmed that role of human nature as defined by classical realism.

MACHIAVELLI: This era also faced a crucial question, "***How is a leader supposed to act in a world animated by such dark forces?***" Machiavelli answered the questions saying that- "***all obligations and treaties with other states must be disregarded if the security of the community is under the threat***." However, he says that imperial expansion is legitimate as it is a means of gaining great security.

MORGENTHAU: in 1948 wrote a book, "***Politics among Nations***". He gave his theory of International Relations. His six principles of IR can be enumerated as follows:-

- i. IR is based on objective laws in human nature.
- ii. Human are selfish and therefore, state is also selfish.
- iii. Power means control on other States.
- iv. There is no fixed or constant national interest. Every states keeps on redefining its national interests.
- v. Private morality is different from public morality. State cannot be put into pressure on ground of morality and immorality. Every states work on their views and interest. There is no place for morality and immorality in International Relations.
- vi. Politics is autonomous. It is not connected with social culture, caste, religion etc.

II. NEO-REALISM (STRUCTURAL REALISM) (1979-onwards)

Beginning: Neo-realism officially begins with *The Publication of Kenneth Waltz's landmark text "Theory of International Politics (1979)"*.

Structural realism believes that:-

- International Politics is a struggle for power.
- Struggle for power is not a result of human nature, unlike the belief of classical realism.
- Struggle for power is result of security competition, inter-state conflicts, lack of overarching authority above states, and the relative distribution of power in International system.

Kenneth Waltz defined the structure of the international system in terms of three elements:-

1. **Organizing principle:-** he identifies two different organizing principles: *1) anarchy, seen in international politics and 2) hierarchy, prevails in domestic order.*
 2. **Differentiation of units:-** here, States are unit of international system. He argues that in international system, all sovereign States are functionally similar. Hence, unit-level variation is irrelevant in explaining international outcome.
 3. **Distribution of capabilities:-** according to Waltz, distribution of capabilities among units is important to understand crucial international outcomes such as war and peace, alliance politics, and the balance of power.
- Structural realist views to rank all the states on the basis of strength in the following areas: **'size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence'**. As this will help to differentiate and count the number of great powers existing at a particular point of time. Further, the number of great powers will help in determining the structure of the international system.
For example, during cold war (1945-89), there were two great powers -the USA and the USSR – that constituted the **bipolar international system.**
 - Structural realism tries to answer the question that is, **"how does the international distribution of power impact the behaviour of states, particularly their power seeking behaviour?"**
According to Waltz,
 - i. The great powers have to be more sensitive to the capabilities of other states.
 - ii. Any State may use force to advance its interests results in all states because they worry about their survival.
 - iii. "Because power is possibly useful means, sensible statesmen try to have an appropriate amount of it." – Waltz writes.

- iv. He adds, “In crucial situations, the ultimate concern of the states is not power but security.”
In other words, rather than being ‘power maximizers’, states becomes ‘security maximizers’.

But here, **Measheimer** differs from Waltz. According to Measheimer, the structure of the international system compels States to maximize their relative power position.

CRITICISM OF STRUCTURAL REALISM (NEO-REALISM)

- **DIFFICULTY IN RANKING STATES:** Structural realist views to rank all the states on the basis of strength in the following areas: ‘**size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence**’. Here, the difficulty is that resource strength does not always lead to military victory.
For example:- in the 1967 *Six Day War* between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, the distribution of resources clearly favoured the Arab coalition and yet the supposedly weaker side annihilated its enemies’ forces and seized their territory.
- **IMPROPER DEFINITION OF ‘POWER AS CAPABILITIES’:** The definition of power as capabilities failed at explaining the relative economic success of Japan over China.
- **EXCLUSIVELY FOCUSES UPON STATE POWER:** For realists, states are the only actors that really ‘count’. MNCs, TNCs, International Organizations, and ideologically driven terrorist networks, such as Al Qaeda, ISIS etc are ignored.

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