

Theories of International Relations: Realism

Main Objectives:

- I. Idealism Vs. Realism
- II. Understanding Realist approach in IR
- III. Basic Assumptions of Realism
- IV. Classical Realism
- V. Neorealism/Structural Realism
- VI. Key Concepts: National Interest, National Power, National Security, Theory of Conflict, Security dilemma, Balance of Power, Deterrence
- VII. Criticism
- VIII. Conclusion

I. Idealism Vs. Realism

I. Idealism Vs. Realism

Idealism	Realism
❖ Main Actor: States, International org/inst., individuals	❖ Main Actor: States
❖ Human Nature: Altruistic	❖ Human Nature: Selfish
❖ Nature of International System: A Community	❖ Nature of International System: Anarchy
❖ Psychological motives of decision makers causes state behaviour	❖ Rational pursuit of self-interest causes state behaviour
❖ Emphasise on morality and goodwill	❖ Emphasise on power over morality

II. Understanding Realist approach in IR

Realism...

- Used in diff. ways in various disciplines
- In IR developed in reaction to liberal tradition (post World WarI)
- Most dominant school of thought
- Also called “power politics” or “real politik”
- Some of the key figures of Realist school-E. H. Carr, Reinhold Niebuhr, Frederick Schuman, Nicholas Spykman, Arnold Wolfers, Kenneth Thompson, George F. Kennan, Hans Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger etc.
- At the core-three SSS- State, Survival and Self-help

Background:

- Thucydides: the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.)
- Kautilya’s Arthashastra:
- Machiavelli: *The Prince* (1532)
- Hobbes’s State of Nature (1588–1679)

Twentieth Century Classical Realism

- ✓ E. H. Carr’s critique of Idealism:
- ✓ Hans Morgenthau’s six Principles of Realism:
- ✓ Neorealism- Kenneth Waltz- the anarchical structure of International System:

III. Basic assumptions of political realism

- Human nature sinful, wicked, lust for power & dominance
- The anarchic nature of international system
- States are most imp actors in int. sys.
- States are rational actors- always maximizing national interest
- National interest defined in term of power which guide the relations among states
- National interest determines the actions of the states in IR
- Main goals of ‘national interest’- National security and survival
- Acc. to Mohinder Kumar, “the basic assumption underlying the realist approach is that rivalry and strife among nations in some form or the other is natural and not a mere accident.”

IV. Classical Realism

- Two main divisions within realism:

(A) Classical realism (B) Neorealism

A) Classical realists (E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau)

- Human beings are selfish and greedy,
- They tend to maximize their own power at the expense of others,
- State behaviour is an extension of individual behaviour,
- Constant conflict.

Morgenthau-six principles of Political Realism:

- i. Politics is governed by objective laws which are based on human nature and psychology...
- ii. The concept of national interest which is defined in terms of power...
- iii. Interest is not fixed and is shaped by the environments...
- iv. The universal moral principles cannot be applied to state's actions and these must be modified according to the circumstances of time and place...
- v. Morgenthau refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral principles that govern the universe...
- vi. Autonomy of International Politics as a discipline...

V. Neorealism/Structural Realism

- ❖ Realists- emphasis on human nature, whereas for the Neorealists the anarchic structure of the international system
- ❖ Neorealists thinkers; Kenneth Waltz , Raymond Aron, Stanley Hoffmann, and Robert Gilpin
- ❖ Structural feature of anarchy and not human nature, that gives international relations their distinctive nature
- ❖ It is because of an anarchic system, states are compelled to behave in ways that lead to conflict
- ❖ Neo-realism is further divided into two sub-groups: Offensive Neo-realism and Defensive Neo-realism
- ❖ Offensive realism -states are power maximizers
- ❖ Defensive realism- states are security maximizers

VI. Realist Approach- Key Concepts:

- ✓ National Interest
- ✓ National Power
- ✓ National Security
- ✓ Theory of Conflict
- ✓ Security dilemma and Theory of Balance of Power
- ✓ Theory of Deterrence

VII. Criticism:

- Failure to predict the transformation of the international system
- Oversimplification
- Criticism by liberal thinkers: democratic peace theory
- Criticism by social constructivist
- Often criticised as excessively pessimistic

VIII. Conclusion:

- Realism; one of IR's dominant and central theoretical traditions
- Major impact on IR; conducive to understanding of the SSS in int. sys.
- An important analytical tool for understanding International Relations.

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