

Realism: the most
effective and
pragmatic approach
to international
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“ This can be said about the generality of men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, dissembling, anxious to flee danger, and covetous of gain.” (Niccolo Machiavelli)

The above mentioned quotation summarizes what, to realists, the human nature is. Man was born with an inborn sense to rule and seek personal gains above everything else. He was driven by lust, desire for power and a deep yearning to be in control of his life. He was, as described by Machiavelli in a poem, „ insatiable, arrogant, crafty and shifting, and above all else malignant, iniquitous, violent, and savage“ (Jack Donnelly). His thirst could only by satisfied by grave’s earth.

If not so, the temptation always existed in his nature and can well be traced to the start of humanity with Adam eating the forsaken fruit and being banished from the Heavens. „ The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it.“ (Oscar Wilde). Realists base their theories on this principle and consider it a fact that man would, if given the opportunity, go to the extremes in order to calm his violent desires.

“(In politics)it needs to be taken for granted that all men are wicked and that they will always give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when opportunity offers” (Niccolo Machiavelli)

Early in the search for his destiny, man realized that he was not the only one in pursuit of such grandeur and that co-existence was a mere illusion.

Confucius said, “ True goodness springs from a man’s own heart. All men are born good.” But as man began to experience the harshness of life his ideals began to change. There were too many outside influences in the Utopian

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world philosophers like Confucius advocated. Man never had that freedom to express love and believe in the concept of a peaceful world, which the poets and philosophers believed so dearly in.

“ The desire to reconcile experience of freedom with the determined environment is the lament of poetry and the dilemma of philosophy.” (Henry Kissinger)

No matter what the human nature, circumstances had a vital role to play in shaping his perception. „ That same human nature which in happy conditions is frail, seems to me to be in other conditions capable of becoming hideous“ (Butterfield). Many realists believe that the sole inborn desire of seeking power is not the only motivation behind a man’s actions. Man had responsibility when it came to protecting himself and all that gave him a sense of belonging (his love, family, home, country etc). He armed himself with every possible tactic to outwit his opponents and overcome all sorts of hurdles, for it was a necessity rather than an option.

“ Even the good must know how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity.” (Niccolo Machiavelli)

The individual analysis of a man’s nature has a far wider scope in „ Classical, Biological and Neo traditional Realism“ and the study of International Relations. The factors which influenced man’s everyday decisions in the micro analysis go on to very much influence those on the macro scale. Man’s responsibility to protect his family and home becomes his responsibility to protect his State and people. His behavior and preferences in dealing with people reflect his foreign policy regarding states. “ As a professor, I tended <https://assignbuster.com/realism-the-most-effective-and-pragmatic-approach-to-international-relations-essay-sample/>

to think of history as run by impersonal forces. But when you see it in practice, you see the difference personalities make.” (Kissinger in a background talk with reporters on his plane after his first Middle East shuttle, January 1974.)

Man’s overall environment is subjected to the individual role each player in it plays. Morgenthau contended that “ social forces are the product of human nature in action...(political problems) are projections of human nature into society”. Furthermore, the concept of leadership in realism finds it of immense importance that the leader’s priority rests in “ self interest” and he alone based on the concept of „ self help“ manages to steer the State out of crisis. But it is only when he learns to defeat every enemy and overcome every obstacle on the individual front, is he truly capable of being the leader of the people.

“ Only those should rule who have the natural temperament and gifts of leadership. Such men of brains are selected mainly through the hard struggle for existence itself. In this struggle there are many who break down and collapse and thereby show that they are not called by Destiny to fill the highest positions; and only very few are left who can be classed among the elect...The idea of personality rules everywhere, the authority of the individual over his subordinates and the responsibility of the individual towards the persons who are placed over him.” (Adolf Hitler)

The state analysis in the scope of “ Neo and Structural Realism” articulates International structure of power and its absence play a vital role in influencing State decisions. It treats anarchy as the main cause of a state

formulating realistic foreign policies. In the realistic paradigm the best defense is taken to be a good offense. Thus, the theory of Realpolitik which states in order for peace to prevail it is necessary for a state to be prepared for war. Man has always been in a state of war and so have been Nations and States.

“ This war, like the next war, is a war to end war.” (Attributed to David Lloyd George,) Conflict, when it comes to between humans is inborn. Attributed to a man’s ego and unlimited wants with limited resources, it is rather unavoidable. Throughout history conflicts have prevailed. “...wars cannot be avoided can only be deferred to the others advantage.” (Niccollo Machiavelli) The earlier a man, leader or a state accepts it, the more prepared it shall be to come out victorious in it. “ A prince must have no other objective, no other thought, nor take up any profession but that of war, its methods and its discipline, for that is the only art expected of a ruler.

And it is of such great value that it not only keeps hereditary princes in power, but often raises men of lowly condition to that rank” (Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, opening of chapter 14, “ A prince’s concern in military matters”) The concept of pragmatism is far more superior in a man’s dealing compared to sentimentalism and idealism. There are certain objectives to be achieved regarding which every possible actions that need to be taken should be taken. “ An idealist believes the short run doesn’t count. A cynic believes the long run doesn’t matter. A realist believes that what is done or left undone in the short run determines the long run.”

(Sidney J. Harris) In the dire quest for self interest – ethics and principles have little role to play.

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Realism has preached time and again that ethics have no place in politics. Especially in the state of anarchy mistrust and prejudice shall strongly prevail. Even in the case of tranquility self interest shall always hinder initiatives towards collective state ventures. Each State shall desire to get the best for himself out of every deal, which again points towards a conflict. This in turn would only be solved through relative power of a State. " For you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is in question only between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." (Athenian envoys, fifth century B. C., Thucydides „ History")

The above mentioned quotation points towards the very first displays of realistic foreign policy. In 433 B. C, conflict between island of Corcyra and Greek city-state Corinth was almost at a state of war. Both parties sent their envoys to Athens in order to seek its help against the other. Athens which at that time was very powerful was a sure winner for any side it opted for. Corcyra's ambassadors spoke first. They straightforwardly admitted that the island had never helped Athens, and had in fact, allied with its enemies. There were no friendly ties or a sense of gratitude between the two. It was accepted that now out of fear and self interest the island had approached Athens.

The only thing which favored a mutual alliance between the two parties was Corcyra's navy which surpassed Athens. The ambassador went on to articulate further how an alliance would strengthen and benefit Athens to come up against its rival Sparta. The representative from Corinth went on to

give an excellent colorful and passionate rhetoric, compared to the dry one of Corcyra.

He started off by stating all that his city had done for Athens and how it was time for Athens to repay. Alienating with an enemy of a friend would put doubts in the minds of other allies of Athens and they might break their agreements. A loyal friend deserved help from Athens at the time of need as it was principally the right way to act. After listening to the speeches the Athenians debated in the assembly and on the second round voted in favor of Corcyra with a majority.

“ History has remembered the Athenians nobly, but they were the preeminent realists of classical Greece. With them all the rhetoric, all the emotional appeals in the world, could not match a good pragmatic argument, especially one that added to their power.

What the Corinthian ambassador did not realize was that his references to Corinth's past generosity to Athens only irritated the Athenians, subtly asking them to feel guilty and putting them under obligation. The Athenians couldn't care less about past favors and friendly feelings. At the same time, they knew that if their other allies thought them ungrateful for abandoning Corinth, these city-states would still be unlikely to break their ties to Athens, the preeminent power in Greece. Athens ruled its empire by force, and would simply compel any rebellious ally to return to the fold. When people choose between talk about the past and talk about the future, a pragmatic person will always opt for the future and forget the past.

As the Corcyrans realized, it is always best to speak pragmatically to a pragmatic person. And in the end, most people are in fact pragmatic—they will rarely act against their own self-interest.” (Robert Greene) Thus, history of realism can easily be traced this far. Coming to the later part of mankind’s history, Machiavelli whose been quoted time to time in this paper and is considered an authority over realism was himself a product of wars between Florence, France and The Holy League (Venice, Spain and England). Being a diplomat he had spent a lot of time in the courts to understand the minds of courtiers and the rulers. It was in this period he gathered a deep insight in foreign affairs and understood the art of foreign policy making.

Machiavelli is often stated to have been guided by the devil himself but this was not the case. He loved his native land of Florentine and was a true patriot. He was liberal to the core and devoted to arts. What he tried to bring to life in his book the Prince was the perfect ruler. He had learnt from the past mistakes of the rulers of his land. Unfortunately having been relieved of his duties he was forced to spend time in exile in a farm. It was there he managed to put to pen all that he had learnt and make it a lesson for many rulers to follow. Otto von Bismarck is another name who appears to be a great advocate of realism.

In 1850, as a deputy in Prussian parliament he stood at a turning point in his career. The issue in debate was the unification of Germany and a war against Austria. The present King Frederick William IV opposed the war and preferred to appease the Austrians. Throughout his career Bismarck had been very passionate regarding unification of Germany and dreamed for a war with Austria which had divided Germany in the first place. But the speech he gave <https://assignbuster.com/realism-the-most-effective-and-pragmatic-approach-to-international-relations-essay-sample/>

in the assembly was totally contradictory and astonished yet moved the listeners. " Woe on to the statesmen, who make war without a reason that will still be valid when the war is over!

After the war you will all look differently at these questions. Will you then have the courage to turn to the peasant contemplating the ashes of his farm, to the man who has been crippled, to the father who has lost his children?" Bismarck went as far as even praising the Austrians and defended her actions. Several in the assembly due to his stance changed votes and the war was averted. The king was pleased and brought Bismarck in his cabinet. Within a year he became Prussian premier.

In this role he managed to lead his country and a peace loving king into a war against the Austrians, out rooting the powerful empire and creating the mighty German state. At the time of debate he had cleverly managed to calculate the might of his country's army which lacked when compared to the Austrians and secondly, he wanted greater power for himself in order to effectively lead his state to war (Robert Greene). The deputy, who cried against raging war, ironically spoke highly of it later on in his life: " The great questions of the time will be decided, not by speeches and resolutions, but by iron and blood."

Coming to recent history starting from World War I, realism went on to explain how it was a war that took place due to each State's lack of trust and uncertainty. Germany's desire to become the global hegemony lead to it taking extreme covert measures to secure alliances and try to consolidate its position as a world power. The Europeans on the other hand moved to form

counter alliances to stop Germany from achieving its goal. Result was a full scale war which left the globe devastated. After World War I, realism was seriously looked down upon. How single perceptions and prejudices of States went on to start a global war which ripped generations of mankind from the earth.

Analysts went on to explain how the war could have been avoided had there been a much more positive approach and communication in world affairs. The treaty of Versailles though at that moment considered a big step towards achieving world peace without having to wage another war, was indeed just an illusion. Germany was not even granted an entry into the council and the members punished it severely for having delusions of grandeur. Imperialism also suffered a setback as many states were granted freedom and empires were broken. This change in the structure of the global politics and the multi-polarity played a major role in what followed.

Realists argue that if America had not sunk in to its isolationist policy, world would not have been at war again. The advent of WWII taught realists a very important lesson and went on to strengthen their belief in a global power to help keep the globe in order. Germany once again rose to achieve what it thought was its destiny. Since there was little interest shown in power politics after World War I, Europe tried desperately to appease Germany. Germany tactfully maneuvered its way and applied the right stratagem at the right time. While Europe slept, it built an unparalleled army ready to seek revenge for the fresh wounds of WWI. Germany resorted to carpet bombing Europe, while Britain in return went out throwing leaflets on Germans telling

them it was a bad idea to go to war with them and peaceful solution could be worked out still.

This lack of realistic approach cost the whole world tremendous humanitarian and monetary loss. After America's intervention the war closed to its end with Germany brought down to the ground, the period of bi-polarity started. Russia and America were the two super powers. Though at the start both worked together but now that the common enemy which bound them together had disappeared both the ideologically different powers sought for power amongst each other. Cold war was every realists dream. Though there were off and on talks of peace now and then, in the background there was no such assumption being thought off. Every single happening was seen through the kaleidoscope of Capitalism vs. Communism, America vs. the Soviets.

During the East Pakistan crisis of 1971, the West Pakistani dictator Yahya Khan had ordered one of the bloodiest and sadistic operations in East Pakistan. East Pakistanis already suffering from a devastating flood entered Indian Territory as refugees. India supported the East Pakistanis in their Bengali movement for freedom and wanted relations with Pakistan to return to status quo. West Pakistan approached America for help. The state department cried to denounce Pakistan's brutality. The American ambassador to India, Kenneth Keating stated " This is the time when principles make best policies".

Officials from State, Defense and CIA were all of the opinion that due to Pakistanis brutality they should move closer to India. But the realist minded

Henry Kissinger had other ideas. Firstly, Pakistan was providing a secret back channel to China and he could not afford to be ungrateful to the Pakistani President. Secondly, he saw the confrontations between India in Pakistan in terms of “ proxy confrontation” between America and Russia. His analysis was simple, in case of confrontation China would come to aid Pakistan while Russia would help India, America should stick with Pakistan in order to deter an all out war and limit Russian meddling. On the other hand President Richard Nixon had a personal bias for India’s president Indira Gandhi. Therefore a biased president and a realist secretary of state managed to “ tilt” America in favor of Pakistan.

The situation though exploded once West Pakistan attacked India and lost the war. The fact that whether America’s decision was right or wrong is another debate, but to see what factors managed to steer a super power’s foreign policy is quite eye opening. (Walter Isaacson) The end of Cold War was something not very expected. Realists believed Soviets would continue their policies until the situation exploded in to another war, this did not happen as the Soviets slowly through the policy of rapprochement managed to accept terms of their talks with America. Hope for conflict resolutions and peace without war was once again kindled.

Yet it has to be accepted that had it not been for America’s tough stand during crisis, Soviets would have taken every opportunity to gain edge over them. 9/11/2001, started another chapter in the world of Power politics and realistic leaders. The Bush administration vowed to cut out terrorism from the world. It was just like the long cycle theory had predicted, United Nations stood as a failed body and America played the role of the big bad boy in <https://assignbuster.com/realism-the-most-effective-and-pragmatic-approach-to-international-relations-essay-sample/>

global politics. Afghanistan considered the hub of terrorists and residence of their Lord Osama bin Ladin was attacked by the Americans.

Iraq's dictator Saddam who was America's right hand during the Gulf War was stated to be out of line with America and to be carrying Weapons of Mass destruction. United Nations and the world stood watching as Iraq was attacked and Saddam ousted. Till day no weapons of mass destruction could be found in Iraq yet barrels of oil were conveniently discovered. For some 9/11 was another Pearl Harbor for America to tighten its position in the global arena. Today the Obama administration vows to save the image of America and win back its goodwill.

Passionate liberal speeches on T. V may win the hearts of the American population but the world is yet to see a major U-turn in American realistic and imperialist policies. Looking at the picture from America's point of view, terrorism may have spread to all parts of the world but has definitely dropped in its own soil. America no longer faces the cartels and Middle Eastern influences on its economy like it did back in the 80's. Furthermore, the interventions in Kosovo By NATO 1999, Iraq by United States 2003 and Libya by NATO in the Libyan Civil War 2011 clearly reflect the procedure of self-interests and realism.

These interventions were backed with the premise constituting humanitarian intervention on the basis that they prevented genocide, ethnic cleansing or the use of weapons of mass destruction. However the proponents have been accused about being concerned about only those countries where American Dominance is viewed with a raised eyebrow (Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Russia,

China, Belarus, North Korea, Sudan) and not in the countries that have a friendlier stance towards America (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Egypt, Georgia, and Colombia). In addition taking the example of Pakistan we can clearly see how much dominance America has because we have lost almost 35000 innocent lives in the War on Terror, a war that was not ours.

What's further enigmatic is that we are still viewed by the world with skepticism and hostility. Our leaders and policies have to be pro-American or else they cannot prevail. Moreover, breaching the sovereignty of Pakistan has now become a walk in the park for US with the regular Drones that kill scores of civilians and even Para-military officers every single day. Consequently, despite the credit crunch and a huge setback to its economy, it still manages its place as the global hegemony.

No matter what changes realism went through in theory, in principle it has always been the same. Each State has to act on behalf of its self interest and welfare for the rest comes second to it. War no matter how severely looked down upon is still being used as an effective weapon to achieve a state's objectives. Nature of a leader indeed does play a huge part in determining the course to be taken by the state regarding its foreign policy. " Foreign Policy cannot be conducted without an awareness of power relationships" (Henry Kissinger, Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy, 1957) Thompson proclaimed that „ human nature has not changed since the days of classical antiquity". The stage might have changed but the actors are still the same.

The world still wears the mask which protects and hides its motives and deeds. "...the court was supposed to represent the height of civilization and refinement. Violent or overt power moves were frowned upon; courtiers would work silently and secretly against any among them who used force. This was the courtier's dilemma: While appearing the very paragon of elegance, they had to outwit and thwart their own opponents in the subtlest of ways... Instead of using coercion or outright treachery, the perfect courtier got his way through seduction, charm, deception, and subtle strategy, always planning several moves ahead.

Life in the court was a never-ending game that required constant vigilance and tactical thinking. It was a civilized war. Today we face a peculiarly similar paradox to that of the courtier: Everything must appear civilized, decent, democratic, and fair. But if we play by those rules too strictly, if we take them too literally, we are crushed by those around us who are not so foolish. As the great Renaissance diplomat and Courtier Niccolo Machiavelli wrote, "Any man who tries to be good all the time is bound to come to ruin among the great number who are not good."

The court imagined itself the pinnacle of refinement, but underneath its glittering surface a cauldron of dark emotions-greed, envy, lust, hatred-boiled and simmered. Our world today similarly imagines itself the pinnacle of fairness, yet the same ugly emotions still stir within us, respect the niceties, but inwardly, unless you are a fool, you learn quickly to be prudent, and to do as Napoleon advised: Place your iron hand inside a velvet glove.

If, like the courtiers of time gone by, you can master the arts of indirection, learning to seduce, charm, deceive, and subtly outmaneuver your opponents, you will attain the heights of power. You will be able to make people bend to your will without their realizing what you have done. And if they do not realize what you have done, they will neither resent nor resist you." (Robert Greene) Thus, the cycle continues for the generations to come and realism itself shall remain as one of the most effective and pragmatic approaches to International Relations.

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