

# A feminist argument to realism in international relations argumentative essay exa...

[Politics](#), [International Relations](#)



The theory of realism has been a source of constant conflict between the government policies and the academia. The lines put forth by John Mearsheimer bear testimony to this conflict. Mearsheimer believes, “Realism appears to have a bright future in the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, we still live in a nasty and brutish world where the great powers compete with each other for power. The only possible threat to realism is likely to come from inside academia, where it is frequently reviled. But any attempt to silence realism within the academy is likely to fail, simply because it is difficult to repress or exclude compelling arguments..” (25) This essay will focus on Mearsheimer's statement and attempt to use the arguments in the theory of Feminism to counter this statement.

This essay will start by examining the context of the statement made by Mearsheimer as well as the core arguments of the theory of Realism. In his article, Mearsheimer seeks to dispel the illusion that the end of the Cold War has led to the end of Realism. He argues that despite the end of the cold war, the fundamental structure of the world order has remained largely unaltered. (26) The potential for conflict still exists in the world today and any one country, say, Japan rearms itself, it would set off alarm bells in other political establishments, particularly China. Having established the importance of realism, Mearsheimer accuses the academia of having an intense dislike for realism, which has resulted in a prejudiced mindset of most of the academic scholars towards any approach or theory that is realist by nature. It is in this precise context that Mearsheimer writes this particular statement.

The philosophy of Realism emerged at the beginning of the previous century

and it became stronger post the Second World War. The core theory of Realism holds the view that competitive self-interest is the driving force behind global politics. This competitive self-interest is the sole reason for countries increasing their defense spending, increasing economic prowess and any steps that further such a goal. (Rourke 20) The effect of such a competition is always a 'zero-sum game' in the theory of Realism, especially given the anarchic state of global politics. In essence, on a practical front, realists hold the following views about global politics - 1. There is little or no hope of effecting changes in the anarchic global political system, 2. It is essential to practice balance-of-power politics, 3. Maintaining peace through strength is a very important aspect of global politics since two equally powerful warring nations have no incentive to begin a mutually destructive war, and 4. A country's politicians should not waste their power on minor goals nor pursue national ambitions that the country can never endeavor to achieve. (Rourke 23) Thus, one can see, in a nutshell, the manner in which the Theory of Realism views the world order and global politics.

The essay will now examine some of the essential aspects of the theory of Feminism that could provide a suitable retort to both Mearsheimer as well as the theory of Realism. John Rourke contends that feminist thought is highly critical of theory of realism. (28) The main assumption one must presume in the case of the Feminist theory applied to International Relations is the definition of the word 'Feminism' to mean "the theory of and the struggle for equality of women." (Rourke 28) As a result, feminists frequently hurl accusations that the field of International Relations is mainly a product of the male viewpoint. They feel that given a chance the field of International

Relations and its related theories would be extremely different and less confrontational (also less oriented towards Realism than they are now). The essay would now proceed to address and counter Mearsheimer's statement using the Feminist perspective. The feminist argument would begin by arguing about the realist's overdependence on the role of the state in delineating international relations without considering the manner in which the state is structured from within - both politically and socially. In case of Mearcheimer, the feminist would argue that realism potentially excludes the views of all the female participants in that country. If a particular state has a domestic culture that leans towards patriarchy, it would also consequently lean towards realism, since the two go hand in hand. Consequently, such a state would also be more realist in its attitude and would not bother to seek the views of all the stakeholders, particularly women in matters of international policy.

A feminist would also say that if women were more proactively included in discussions on International relations the foreign policies could have been arguably more balanced and humane. In short, the first stance of the feminist would be to challenge the policymakers who participate in such discussions since, generally, women bear the brunt of the attacks in the form of war atrocities that are usually more horrific when it comes to women.

(Ruiz 3) Thus, a feminist would challenge the very fact that this statement having come from John Mearsheimer, itself, weakens its credibility since this statement only presents one view while ignoring all other facets. Since Mearsheimer is a realist and his views (as well as the views of realism) stand contrary to the feminist perspective, a feminist would reject this statement

outright from a standpoint feminist perspective. The second part of the statement about the role of academia, a feminist would likely say that opposition to the realist thought stems from academia for two possible reasons: 1. Academicians tend to be more objective and inclusive in their views due to which they reject the slanted realist position, and 2. The presence of a certain number of women in the academic circles has ensured that the thought on international relations is well rounded. For this precise reason, a feminist would tend to support the academia's objection to the realist position since the arguments in favor of realism, however compelling, tend to exclude a large section of the populace from giving their opinion. At the same time, a feminist would also reject Mearsheimer's contention that realism is here to stay in the 21st century and would rather agree that realism is an obsolete relic of the 1990s era.

The second argument against realism put forth by a feminist would be the issue of human security and the humanitarian perspective. When state and state-interests dictate policy, history tells us that conflicts and wars become almost inevitable. However, realism does not account for the human security issues that occur during war - the death of civilians, the rape of women, looting and arson in cases of internal strife et. al. On the contrary, highly militarized states extract a heavy human cost in terms of poverty, economic inequality and abuse of resources as well as other ills such as unemployment and consequent civil strife. (Jonsson 24) The main difference between Realism and Feminism with regard to the characterization of the term 'security,' is that in Feminism, the term has no meaning if it is built on others' insecurity. However, realism precisely aims at building security on others'

insecurities. (Jonsson 25)

On the other hand, feminism calls for a greater participation by women in the military as well as policy making so that alternative perspectives to realism could be considered. Therefore, a feminist only asks for the role of women in policy making that were traditionally male driven and, hence, realist in nature. Finally, in order to sum up this discussion and attempt to apply it to an intervention in a conflict, one can view realism as a theory having a top-down perspective, with a stronger accentuation towards structural issues such as sovereignty, territorial integrity et. al. (Jonsson 26)

On the other hand, the feminist approach is more of a bottom-up approach. Considering this argument, a feminist would similarly dismiss Mearsheimer's claim that realism is the future of civilization. The modern world order requires that problems are better solved through intervention and diplomatic channels rather than a realist perspective. War should be the very last option. As far as the academy's dissent towards realism is concerned, that a feminist would say academicians would surely consider humanitarian issues within the framework of international relations and related policies.

Therefore, it is on expected lines that some academicians with a feminist view would raise a voice of dissent against their realist counterparts within the academy. However, in the end, the feminist would view that it would be the issues of human security and feminism that would trounce since the policy of realism has only given us a previous century of wars and conflicts. In conclusion, one can clearly see that realism and feminism are at the absolute opposite ends of the political spectrum within international relations. The feminist arguments presented manage to decimate

Mearsheimer's statement to some extent. Also, Mearsheimer's assertion that "attempts to silence realism within the academy are likely to fail" comes more of a veiled threat to feminists and others opposed to the realist thought. This statement reflects that it has been made without considering the changes in the mindsets of a majority of people globally who prefer not to deal with the evils of war and hence, indirectly, support the feminist perspective. Therefore, this essay concludes that the role of realism in modern state policy has been limited to a very large extent for humanitarian as well as related security reasons and would be likely to stay that way in the future.

## **Works Cited**

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