

The trent affairs outcome is explained by realism not democratic peace essay exam...

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



Political realism, liberalism and constructivism are three theories alive in international relations today. However, throughout history, one theory outshines the rest by continuously playing a vital role in world-wide affairs. From on-going wars to daily foreign policy acts, the philosophy of realism is applied more often than not. Realism looks at the uncertainty that exists between nations and how the various conflicts in the world need to be followed accordingly, without trust. This theory can be appropriately applied to events today and many historical conflicts over the centuries.

Comparatively, liberalism is a theory that, although it already existed, transformed with the creation of the United States (U. S.) and is one that involves the understanding that states are rooted in domestic and international civil society. Liberalism was, for the most part, created by critics of realism and comes from four principles developed over time: “individual freedom, political participation, private property, and equality of opportunity” (Badie, Schlosser and Morlino, 2011, p. 1435). Classical liberalism received its foundation from the Founding Fathers and such theorists as John Locke and Adam Smith (Loberfeld, 2004).

The liberalist argument concentrates on how states’ actions can help create a world of less conflict and more peace. However, that is not necessarily true. A “liberal democracy leaves a coherent international legacy on foreign affairs: a separate peace. Liberal states are peaceful with each other, but they are also prone to make war on non-liberal states” (Badie, Schlosser and Morlino, 2011, p. 1435). Scholars, over the past 30 years, have found strong evidence for the existence of peace among liberal democracies but not between democracies and non-democracies.

According to Rosato (2003, p. 592), there is proof that democracies do not necessarily solve conflicts with each other as well. The potential crises that developed in the 19th and 20th centuries involving the democracies of Britain, France, Germany, and U. S. goes against this logic of mutual peace among democracies. In an analysis of these different events, like the Trent Affair, Christopher Layne states in *International Security* (1994): "" In each of these crises, at least one of the democratic states involved was prepared to go to war. . . . In each of the four crises, war was avoided not because of the 'live and let live' spirit of peaceful dispute resolution at democratic peace theory's core, but because of realist factors"" (Rosato, 2003, p. 592).

The Trent Affair is a prevailing example of this theory. The conflict began during the first year of the American Civil War when the USS San Jacinto, without orders, intercepted the British mail ship Trent. Two of the Confederacy's commissioners-designate to Great Britain and France, James M. Mason and John Slidell, were taken prisoner and brought to Boston. The British government and the citizens exploded in anger. Talk of war with the U. S. was in high fever, something that would have crippled the Union's chances of success. Abraham Lincoln eventually had to concede to British demands, not because of any trust between democratic countries, but because he realized his own nation would be lost if the U. S. had to fight an additional war. Layne (1994, pp. 21-22) continues:

Theory. . . . Believing that vital reputational interests affecting

its global strategic posture were at stake, London played diplomatic hardball,

employed military threats, and was prepared to go to war if necessary. . . .

An Anglo-American conflict was avoided only because the Lincoln administration came to understand that diplomatic humiliation was preferable to a

war that would have arrayed Britain with the Confederacy and thus probably have secured the South's independence".

Realists understand that states like the U. S. and Britain are condemned to exist in a constant struggle with security and that the Democratic Peace Theory does not work. Two additional examples reflecting the idea that democracies will enter into conflict with other democracies, are: 1) the imperialists' invasions of the 19th Century by Britain; and, 2) the Cold War intrusions of growing democracies like Iran, Guatemala, Indonesia, British Guyana, Brazil, Chile, and Nicaragua. Rosato (2003, p. 588) concluded at the end of his study in *The Flawed Logic of the Democratic Peace Theory* that " it is hard to justify the " imperial" wars in terms of self-defense. Several cases are clear-cut: The democracy faced no immediate threat and conquered simply for profit or to expand its sphere of influence".

Rosato also found that mutual trust and respect could not be found in the U. S's treatment of fellow democracies during the Cold War. If a conflict of interest existed in the nation's goal to contain communism, it took priority over respecting smaller democratic and potential democratic nations. In

many cases, the government destabilized the nation and forced in autocratic leadership (Rosato, 2003, p. 590).

It is believed that the theory of realism actually dominated political events during the Cold War, because it provided straightforward but “ powerful explanations for war, alliances, imperialism, obstacles to cooperation, and other international phenomena, and because its emphasis on competition was consistent with the central features of the American-Soviet rivalry” (Walt, 1998, p. 31).

Another philosophy of international affairs is constructivism. Unlike liberalism and realism, constructivism is not exactly a political theory. It does not tell us who to study, but encourages us to look at how the states are socially constructed (Wendt, 1999, p. 7). This theory meets in the middle ground, centering on shared ideas. It takes the structure and causes the main actors to redefine their interests and identities in the process of intermingling (Copeland, 2000, p. 190).

Constructivism eliminates the main focus of realists that concentrates on the possibility of anarchy and the need for continuous scrutiny of security. The neorealist position is that anarchy forces nations into continuous security struggles. However, according to Wendt (1999) and the constructionist theory, whether a system is at odds or peaceful is a function of the mutual culture created through social practices. “ States are not condemned by their anarchic situation to worry constantly about relative power and to fall into tragic conflicts. They can act to alter the intersubjective culture that constitutes the system, solidifying over time the non-egoistic mind-sets needed for long-term peace” (Copeland, 2000, p. 188).

However, according to Copeland, Wendt neglected the realist idea that uncertainty exist in both the present and the future. Realist theory is driven by this belief of uncertainty. A realist would consider a constructionist as being inexperienced in their trust and ignoring the uncertainty that exists between states (Copeland, 2000, p. 188).

The weaknesses of constructivism can be seen in the history of U. S-Iran relations (US-Iran-Relations. com, 2009). The blank slate that some believed existed between the U. S. and Iran changed drastically with the U. S. assisted placement of the Shah in Iran in the 1950s. This resulted in the development of a state with a purely anti-western ideology. A consequence of this ideology was the 1979 Islamic revolution, followed by the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran and the subsequent 444-day hostage crises. Relations between the U. S. and Iran have continually gotten worse over the past few decades based on the inter-subjective meaning (shared understanding of the nature of things), interpreted by hostility. In a constructionist view, the conflicts between the two countries do not exist because of conflicting interests. Instead it can be blamed on the ideas and threats dwelling in the individual nations about each other (US-Iran-Relations. com, 2009).

Constructivism does attempt to explain the irrational behavior that can exist between

states and societies; nonetheless, there are complications with the theory.

“ Realists argue that it does not give sufficient credence to the material realities of the world. Systemic Constructivism is particularly ill-equipped to address uncertainty. Realism would suggest that a state that takes a

Constructivist view of the world is naïve; a state may "befriend" another state only as a means to take advantage of it at an opportune time". (U. S.-Iran-Relations. com, 2009)

The creation of Iran's nuclear program is more accurately understood under a neorealist theory. It only makes sense that if a state is feeling endangered, that same state would want to reduce the threat through a nuclear deterrent. Or, according to other forms of realism, the weapons are being acquired to further the purpose of aggressive ambitions. On the other hand, constructivists look at the motivation and meaning behind the acquisition, and consider policy-makers perceptions. They tend to believe Iran wants these weapons due to questions of identity and insight. Liberalists believe the emphasis is on domestic political authorities; and, realists focus on the dominance and security within the international system (Sherrill, 2012, pp. 31-32).

Some believe constructivism can be applied to historical events throughout the ages. It is capable of explaining all wars by referring to distinguishing features and identity. "The conquests of Alexander the Great, Julius Cesar and Napoleon may be perceived as embodiments of the same cultural legacy. And yet, it would be an oversimplification;. . . ideas, rather than political cynicism constituted those people" (Lisinski, 2012).

According to Lisinski (2012), constructivism has the advantage of concentrating on social factors and weighing the importance of context. However, realism remains the primary focus in the international field today.

“ Realism, although flawed with oversimplification and inability to address various issues concerning war, remains the dominant theory of international relations. That is because although the domestic realm in many countries and across cultures has experienced a certain degree of progress, which is an unaddressed issue by realism, the international arena seems to be ruled by the balance of power”. (Lisinski, 2012)

Political leaders all over the world seem to adopt the balance of power and the theory of realism. They basically use a worst-case scenario philosophy that seems to work better in the big picture. On the other hand, the subjectiveness of the constructivist way of thinking can cause too much guessing about the intentions of a state's actions.

According to Andrew Moravcsik (n. d., p. 2), it has been admitted by those in the international field that realism is still central to political thought in the West. Many aspects of the realist tradition, among them its longevity, thriftiness, and appeal to policy-makers, are a few of the reasons for its success. “ The most fundamental reason is that it remains the only clearly articulated theoretical approach (often termed a “ paradigm”) in the field of international relations” (Moravcsik, n. d., p. 3).

Although a complex philosophy, political realism in the international world is defined by political players (i. e. nations) that are concerned mainly with their own national interests and beneficial outcomes. Perhaps the most famous realist of all time is Niccolo Machiavelli, the 16th century author of The Prince (1515). The basic principle of the novel used by leaders throughout the ages is that the ‘ end justifies its means’. Although

Machiavelli does not actually make this statement in his book, the phrase has ultimately been used as a free ticket to do anything in the political arena that benefits one's state.

In the 20th century, Hans Morgenthau became known as the 'father of the realist paradigm'. During the various conflicts that have taken place over the years, he always looked strictly at U. S. interests when applying the theory. Not only did he look at these interests, but Morgenthau also remained consistent in his application of the theory for decades. ". . . . What appeared in Morgenthau's later career to be an intellectual shift in fact stemmed from the progressivism inherent in the actual existing realism of Morgenthau's early career applied to new situations met in his later career" (Keaney, 2006, p. 6).

One conflict that demonstrated Morgenthau's application of both conservative and progressive realism was the Vietnam War. He did not look at the war as a moral issue, only as what had the potential at the time to be damaging to U. S. interests. After he helped develop the policy for containment in the 1950s, Morgenthau was invited to visit South East Asia in 1954, a period that marked a transformation in his relationship with U. S. policymakers (Keaney, 2006, pp. 14-15).

Morgenthau issued a warning about Vietnam in a series of essays published in The New Republic after meeting with top Vietnamese policy makers and seeing firsthand the U. S. involvement in the region. Morgenthau analyzed the causes of the U. S. presence. " Outlining the situation, Morgenthau described the war as consisting of one superpower engaged in warfare and diplomacy in a region outside its direct and natural area of concern, and

another much smaller power engaged in (depending on one's point of view) a civil war or at the very least local war" (Keaney, 2006, p. 15).

His criticism of the Vietnam War seemed odd considering that he was the father of realism in this era. However, his thoughts still remained on the protection of U. S. interests abroad. Morgenthau believed in the containment of communism, but believed that it ultimately blinded policymakers to the real interests of the U. S. He blamed John Foster Dulles for this and guiding moralism into international policy.

" For what is significant about Morgenthau's reasoning is that it was based not on a moral assessment of U. S. policy but rather on a realist analysis of what actions or policies in the given circumstances would best serve the interests of the United States. Thus Morgenthau explained, "'for better or for worse we live again in an age of revolution. It is the task of statesmanship not to oppose what cannot be opposed with a chance of success but to bend it to one's own interests'" (Keaney, 2006, p. 17).

Turning to another type of conflict, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, also gives us some perspective on the realist theory. The current Iraq involvement began a few years after the tragedy of 9/11. The invasion can be addressed by realists' terms by the calculation of security interests. Under the realism theory and rationality, the U. S. demonstrated: " its power to allies and competitors alike" of avoiding an appearance of decline in the post 9-11 era, preventing Iraq's use of oil resources to threaten the U. S. or its allies, and to prevent Iraq's collaboration with anti-U. S. terrorist groups (Lieberfeld, 2005, p. 4).

The uncertainty that exists in the world does give realists the edge in world affairs. One can look to dozens of conflicts to apply this theory. Whether it is the American Civil War, the Cold War, the Trent Affair, Iran, or the invasion of Iraq, realism always takes center stage.

Both the liberalists and the constructivists' theories can be useful in looking at exactly what is occurring in the conflicts between nations or other actions within nation-states. They mean well, both are centered on peace much more so than realism. However, they usually fail in the application process. First of all, as shown above in regards to the Democratic Peace Theory under liberalism, democracies can easily go to war with each other. Usually this is due to imperialistic necessity, however, this reflects the fact that peace is not accomplished easily because of a more peaceful intent. The theory also fails when applying it to both the American Civil War and the Cold War. The former involved a President whom had too many concerns at home and the latter, which involved direct containment of communism by poorly influencing smaller democratic countries. Yet, realism provided straightforward answers towards the question of war during this time.

For the constructivism theory, the U. S.-Iran conflict based on the former's nuclear program is the best sample of how one theory fails where another would prevail. Relations between the U. S. and Iran have continually gotten worse and the easiest way to analyze this is through realizing the conflict of interests that continually exists, not on the inter-subjective meaning as interpreted by constructionists.

Therefore, the realist theory prevails over other theories, due to its analysis of conflicts of interests between nations and the concentration on one's own

security interests over other nations. It has worked through the ages and will continue to do so.

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