

# The department of political science,

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THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES.

COURSE: POS 741 (THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS) TOPIC:

ENVIRONMENTAL THEORIES GROUP MEMBERS: (1)OSAYIMWEN OSAHON

GEORGE (2)IBIYEMI ENOCH OLAWALE (3)JOLAOSO AYOMIPO OPEYEMI TO BE

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Environmental theory, this approach refers to the research area in which scholars of political theory use their conceptual tools in an effort to better understand the relationship between human individuals or communities and their natural environment, to identify the values and ideas that have shaped and continue to structure the way that humans interact with the natural world or to articulate vision of how politics might define and help realize an ecologically sustainable world . This approach attempts to explain how human beings, individually or collectively behave in relation to nature or to other human beings can most usefully be anchored in the study of the evolution of the ecosystem society interface. Using human populations and their biological and ecological circumstances as a starting point, a theoretical framework can be developed that grounds international relations theory in environmental realities. Environmental theory is neither a method nor a well defined political agenda. Scholars in the field utilize a wide variety of existing methodologies and in the pursuit of various goals. Like an ecosystem, its strength lies in diversity and there has not yet emerged as dominant approach to this young research programme. Binding together the various scholarship in environmental theory is a belief that environmental problems are at least in part a product of the social and political ideas of modern western societies.(Steve Vanderheiden, University of Colorado, U. S. A) THE

**ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS** The role of environing factors include the physical milieu (geography) and the social milieu (culture), as conditioners of political behaviour, has attracted major theoretical interest for many generations. Especially until the end of the World War II, the study of international relations drew heavily on geography as an explanation for state behaviour. States were said to be advantaged, or handicapped by geographic location and circumstances. With the dawn of the nuclear age and the development of postindustrial industrial societies, environing factors notable the role of geography diminished in salience. Nuclear weapons capable of intercontinental range greatly diminished whatever security had been derived from geographic location. By the same token, postindustrial societies depend more on access to information-based technologies and intellectual capabilities than on physical control of territory containing natural resources such as coal and iron, nevertheless became the world's second largest economy based on cutting-edge technologies. Despite its remoteness from Europe, Asia, the United States and European-Asian states became equally vulnerable to a nuclear strike delivered by intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of reaching their targets within minutes. Furthermore, according to the view of Aristotle, he stated that people and the environment are inseparable and that they are affected both by geographical circumstances and by political institutions. Location near the sea stimulated the commercial activity on which the city-state was based; temperate climate favourable affected the development of national character, human energy and intellect. Jean Bodin in the late sixteenth century also maintained that climatic circumstances influence national

characteristics as well as the foreign policies of state. According to Bodin, the extremes of northern and temperate climates offer conditions most favourable to building a political system based on law and justice. Northern and mountainous regions were said to be conducive to greater political discipline than were southern climes which failed to spark initiative.

Montesquieu, one of the great eighteenth century French philosophers pointed to various climatic factors that he felt influenced the political divisions of Western Europe, in contrast to the great plains of Asia and Eastern Europe, and contributed to a spirit of political independence. He claimed the islands could preserve their freedom more easily than continental countries because they are isolated from foreign influences. He stated this considering Britain which had evolved unique political institutions that he greatly admired and which had withstood invasion from continental Europe since 1066.

APPROACHES TO ENVIRONMENTAL THEORIES There are four major theories to be considered here which are: (1)Utopian theory (2)Realist theory (3)Neoliberal and neorealist-structural-realist theory (4)Cognitive evolution and constructivist-reflectivist approaches Utopian and realist theory as well as their more contemporary intellectual counterparts discuss the human actor in relation to the environment. Nonetheless, they broaden the notion of the environment to include the products of human culture, as well as the physical features of the earth. Utopian theorists claimed that international behaviour could be changed by transforming the institutional setting. Schemes for international organization and world government as well as for establishing norms for international conduct were designed to alter human behaviour by changing the international political

environment. In contrast, realists in international relations often held that the geographical location of states will condition if not determine political behaviour. Among the most influential realist theorists who also wrote extensively on the impact of geography on international politics were Nicholas J. Spykman and Robert Strausz-Hupe. If the political behaviour of national units is in large part the product of environmental circumstances including geography in which nations find themselves, the perennial task of the political leader is to work within the parameters established by the environment. Cognitive evolution and constructivist-reflectivist approaches

The principal focus of what are termed constructivist-reflectivist approaches is the assumption that our understanding of the world as well as the intellectual tools used for viewing that world , are not objectively derived but instead are the result of socially constructed concepts. In a way, the proponents of this approach suggest that “ the world is in the eye of the beholder" and then proceed to ask where those interpretations of the world come from and how they influence the behavior of individual and state actors.

**GLOBALIZATION AND THE SPREAD OF EMERGING DISEASES** The synthesis between the environment and international relations is useful in assessing both the consequences of globalization and the causes of emerging and resurging diseases. Human populations have been and are continually evolving as they face the changing constraints provided by nature and neighbouring populations. The continued ecological security of any human population depends upon maintaining an evolutionary equilibrium in four relationships: (1) Between the size and demands of human population and the sustaining physical environment. (2) Between the size and growth

pattern of neighbouring human populations. (3) Between the territorial demands of human populations and other large species. (4) Between human populations and various kinds of pathogenic micro-organisms. Throughout most of history, Homo sapiens lived in culturally diverse and relatively isolated hunting and gathering populations. These populations co-evolved with a host of local micro-organisms in shared ecosystems since the industrial revolution. However, innovations in transportation and weaponry have been forging a world in which human populations have been brought into a much closer contact. While the increased integration of this previously diverse population has had a myriad of both positive and negative consequences for human beings, it has also upset delicate equilibrium between homo sapiens and pathogenic microorganisms to which they have developed little or no immunity. Movement of the pathogenic microorganisms among human populations through exploration, trade, conquest has played a major role in shaping history. William McNeill refers to this kind of pathogen mixing as the confluence of disease pools. Such mixing was a particularly important factor in nearly wiping out numerous indigenous populations during the age of imperialism when Europeans first made contact with these people. Europeans, bringing with them smallpox and numerous other diseases, easily conquered biologically naive new world populations almost without a shot being fired. Many other historical studies have stressed the impact of disease and related ecological factors in the course of international relations. Innovations in transportation are the most obvious factors in accelerating the movement of people and thus increasing the scope and rapidity of human contacts. Only four decades ago,

transoceanic travel was relatively rare and most voyages were made on slow moving steamships. Today the increased use of rapid air transportation puts nearly all urbanized parts of the planet within one day's journey for a majority of the people in the world. The increasing scale of food production, distribution and the resulting associated disease risks are another aspect of globalization. The appearance of "Mad cow" disease among British cattle herds has had major impact on international trade in beef and on the British balance of payment. In 1996, a serious bout of food poisoning in Japan sickened more than 10,000 people and killed several others. In 1997, in the United States, imported berries from Central America were responsible for widespread intestinal disorders. Thus the dark side of technology is the creation of the potential for large scale epidemics that may require additional technological innovations to solve. The more rapid movements of large numbers of people whether by aircraft or subway, increases the speed with which diseases can move from one person to another. Population growth and movement into formerly pristine tropical rainforests continue to liberate microorganisms with which Homo sapiens have little experience. Urbanization and development of megacities create potentially explosive situations for the spread of diseases. Even the increased use of anti-biotic to fight diseases threatens to create resistant bacterial strains. In conclusion, from an environmental perspective on international relations, interactions with microorganisms is simultaneously a causal factor in influencing state success and behaviour and a continuing policy of concern of extreme importance. (Professor Dennis Pirages, University of Maryland, 1997).

**GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS OF NATIONAL POWER** With the advent of

industrial-age communication-transportation technologies, increased attention was given to geography, focusing on population-resource distribution, the strategic location of states and the forward projection of national power. Because geopolitics has as its focal point national power and the control of territory, it followed that those political entities must be able to project their capabilities over greater distances would constitute the dominant industrial-age powers. According to numerous writers including for example Kenneth Boulding and subsequently Patrick O'Sullivan-there is an inverse relationship between power and distance from its core area. In O'Sullivan's words, most of the conflicts (since the mid 1950s) have arisen in the crush zone between the great powers. The force fields of the hegemonies may be thought of as extending out of their cores, overwhelming smaller nations with their power, surrounding the spheres of influence of lesser powers and lapping against each other at the edges. To be sure the impact of technology has been of such importance as explained so far, the political significance of geography has been altered, although not eliminated. To the extent that weapons of mass destruction can be launched from any point on earth, from under the oceans, or from outer space, to strike a target with the periphery has lost most of its previous significance. However, the capabilities available to political entities are numerous, with some easily moveable than others. In an era before the airplane and the missile, when the military capabilities were most easily moved by sea, the political unit most able to master sea power became the dominant state. At an abstract level, the relationship between geography and power. Geopolitics refers to the ability at any time of one state or another to move power in order to influence or



control desired territory deemed to be of strategic importance. Furthermore we will be considering the views of some scholars on the environmental theories which are discussed below: MAHAN's view Alfred Thayer Mahan wrote during the period of the last great wave of European imperial expansion and the rise of the United States to the status of a world power. His ideas greatly influenced Theodore Roosevelt who first as Assistant Secretary of the navy and later as President, contributed decisively to the rise of the United States as a leading naval power. Mahan's analysis of maritime history, particularly the growth of British global influence, led him to conclude that the control of the seas and especially strategically important narrow waterways, was crucial to great power status. Mahan based his theory on the observation that the rise of the British Empire and the development of Britain as a naval power had occurred simultaneously. The world's principal sea routes had become the empire's internal communication links. Except for the Panama Canal, Britain controlled all of the world's major waterways and narrow seas or choke points. MACKINDER's view Like Mahan, Sir Halford Mackinder saw an intimate relationship between geography and technology. If the technology of the earlier era had enhanced the mobility of sea power over land power, the technology of the early twentieth century gave to land power the dominant position. The railroad and subsequently the internal combustion engine and the construction of modern highway and road network, made possible rapid transportation within much of the land mass of Eurasia. Until then, the inner regions of Eurasia had been landlocked. Mackinder noted that Eurasia's river systems drain into none of the major seas of the world. View of the SPROUTS Harold

Sprout (1901-1980) and Margaret Sprout (1903) made a major contribution to the development of hypotheses for examining environing relationships. The Sprouts emphasized the importance of geography in examining political behavior, contending that most, if not all, human activity is affected by the uneven distribution of human and non human resources. The sprouts rejected undimensional, geographical theories in favour of an ecological perspective because it appeared to provide a more integrated holistic view of international environment which took account of its physical and non physical features. The environment (milieu) was viewed as a multidimensional system in which the perception held by political leaders of environmental conditions (the psycho milieu) as well as the conditions themselves were the objects of study and analysis.

**ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS**

It will be incomplete to study the environmental approaches without taking note of the crisis which are accrued to it and these are explained below:

(1)Global warming: This is acknowledged by most but not all scientists as the most serious environmental problem facing the planet, the minority who challenge the consensus do not question the evidence of global warming but question its causes arguing that warming is not primarily caused by human activity. However majority of scientists do believe that humans are largely responsible for global warming. The earth's temperature is maintained by the green house effect, a layer of gases in the atmosphere traps a small percentage of the sun's radiation but the burning of fossil fuels increases the greenhouse effect.

(2)Resource depletion: some resources such as fish are with careful stewardship, naturally replenished; other resources are threatened by excessive demand and so overproduction (this raises the

question of the tragedy of the commons. (3) Localized pollution: This may not cause a global crisis but poor air in places such as Mexico City can have a debilitating effect on inhabitants. (4) Decline in species: Although the effects of species loss or decline in biodiversity are unclear, many ecologists would argue that the loss of species is bad in itself regardless of its wider impact. The use of agricultural chemicals and the genetic modification of crops are identified by some environmentalists as the cause of decline in biodiversity. (5) Nuclear war: This will not of course be a direct environmental problem unless nuclear weapons are actually used (although nuclear weapons testing has had environmental consequences). In the 1980s, when consciousness of the threat of nuclear war was much higher than it is today, scientists speculated that the atmospheric pollution caused by dust, soot, smoke and ash would prevent the sun's rays from penetrating for a period of time long enough to eradicate most plant life and create a new ice age.

**POLICY DEBATE** This is a major point that should be duly considered in dealing with the environmental theory and this is : who is primarily responsible for the international environmental problems we now face, the developing countries or the developed countries? Developed countries are responsible due to the following reasons: (1) Developed countries have insatiable appetites for natural resources beyond what is needed for an adequate standard of living. (2) Emissions from industrial plants and automobile plants disproportionately represented in developed countries are responsible for depletion of the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect and resulting global warming and climate change. Agribusiness in the developed states, because of its use of fertilizers and chemicals is

responsible for the pollution of natural waters and land-based wastes.

(3) Chemical companies located in industrialized states produce highly toxic wastes for which there are no safe means of disposal. (4) Excessive demands in the developed world for energy and forestry-based resources put unsustainable pressure on the natural environment. Developing countries are also responsible due to the following reasons: (1) High birth rates, a feature of the developing world put pressure on communities to expand the amount of land under cultivation moving people to increasingly marginal land. (2) Use of marginal land for agriculture and grazing leads to desertification in dry areas or erosion and flooding in wet areas. (3) High birth rate countries are unable to provide basic sanitation systems for their populations resulting in degradation of the environment and disease.

(4) When developing countries are industrialized under pressure to increase output to meet a growing population, no attention is given to environmentally friendly processes. **CRITIQUES OF ENVIRONMENTAL THEORIES** Critics of environmental theories including the Sprouts take issue with writers who engage in environmentalistic rhetoric and assume that attitudes or decisions are determined, influenced, or in some other ways casually affected by environmental factors. Although the Sprouts reject environment as a determinant of politics, they conceive as crucial (a) the actor's perception of environmental factors (b) limitations to human activity posed by the environment. According to Strausz-Hupe, geographic conditions have been modified by humans throughout history. Geographic conditions determine largely where history is made but it is always man who makes it. Technological changes may have altered the significance of the theorizing of

certain of the writers examined in this discussion although advanced technology has rendered environmental relationships ever more important. Many writers have suggested, modern science and technology have transformed the environment in intended but also in unintended ways. Science and technology have brought uninvited guests in such forms as air pollution, traffic congestion and resource scarcity. In the twentieth century, the pace of scientific-technological innovation has quickened beyond any historical precedent and people in all parts of the globe have been drawn into the orbit of modern technology. Whether changes wrought by technology are affecting the environment in ways beyond the means of coping with them remains an unanswered question. What is certain is that inextricable relationships or linkages exist among technology, geography and international politics. CONCLUSION Thus at the end of the twentieth century, the focus on the milieu in the literature of international relations represents a convergence of several principal interests of scholars and policymakers. These include resource scarcity and conflict, population growth, the relationship of geography to political power, the emergence of post cold war geographical relationships and the increased importance of geopolinomic and geoeconomic concepts. In short, a new set of geopolitical or geostrategic relationships has come into existence , largely as a result of the pervasive impact of technology on international relations generally and specifically on the foreign policies of states. Because the perception of the milieu and the impact of the milieu itself is central to decision making and to political behaviour generally, those concerned with the development of theories of political behaviour at the international level have taken renewed

interest in environmental relationships. Political systems have been hypothesized to be open systems susceptible to inputs from and making outputs to their environments. Lastly, the issues of pollution and ecology and of population growth and food supply have led to efforts both to forecast trends and to develop models often neo-Malthusian in nature. The milieu then provides a unique focal point not only for older and contemporary theorizing but also for analytical and normative theory in international relations in the years ahead, for the final analysis, all policies and other patterns of international interaction are set within a political, social, cultural and geographic environment.

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