

What are the main differences between classical realists and neorealists essay sa...

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



All realists focus on military and geo-strategic issues, as well as issues of high politics. Realists emphasized that problems in politics are caused by human nature and the lack of international system. As a result, realists make international relations mainly a domain of power and interest. Main Differences While there are core elements common to all realists, it is important to be aware of the significant differences among scholars who are referred to as such.

This essay examines the main differences between the two dominant strands of realism: classical realism and neorealism. Human Nature and Structure First, classical realists believe that the cause of international war and conflict is attributed by an imperfect human nature, while neorealists locate its roots in the anarchic international system. Jackson and Sorensen said that part of the aspect of human condition is competition and uncertainty, and these are constant and fixed parts of the human life (Jackson and Sorensen 2007).

Hans Morgenthau, one of the chief advocates of classical realism who took inspiration from earlier scholars like Thomas Hobbs and Machiavelli, proposed what he believed to be the six principles of political realism. First, Morgenthau was certain that society in general is ruled by laws that originated in human nature (Forde 1995). According to Morgenthau, ever since the earlier times of Greek philosophers, the human nature has already been egoistic and selfish.

In contrary, neorealists disagree with classical realists about the role of human nature in international conflict. Instead, they blame the structure of the international system as the leading cause of the conflict. According to

Waltz, the structure of the international system is non-hierarchical with political states achieving basically the same job as others in order to survive and sustain (Jackson and Sorensen 2007). For Waltz, it is not the human nature that should be blamed for the conflict in international system; rather it is the anarchic structure of the system.

Neorealists believed that an anarchic system leaves states with no option but to do everything in their power to remain existent. The second principle of political realism laid out by Morgenthau is the notion that power is an end in itself, as opposed to the belief of neorealists that power is solely a means to an end (Forde 1995). The issue of power will be discussed in detail later on. The third principle is focused on the significance of a deep comprehension and understanding of the human behaviour for the state to effectively conduct its matters efficiently (Forde 1995).

In contrast to this, neorealists like Richard Ashley emphasised that the human condition can only be illustrated as 'surface practice' created only in turn by a "deeper independently existing structure" (Ashley 1984, p. 227). The fourth principle according to Morgenthau asserts that 'universal moral principles cannot be applied' to relations between states as leaders are oftentimes required to step in and take action even though it is sometimes ethically wrong, for the sake of best serving the interests to those whom they are responsible for, such as their people (Forde 1995).

In Machiavelli's work entitled 'The Prince', he argues that for the ruler to retain his power, he cannot always operate in a customary mode that is

considered kind (Mingst 2004). For a ruler to keep his power, he is frequently compelled to work faithlessly, remorselessly, and cruelly. Neorealists, on the other hand, would reject the role presented by universal moral principles completely. The fifth principle emphasises that international politics is an independent area of activity (Baylist & Smith 2008). Hence, it should not be downgraded to economic elucidations.

This principle asserts that leaders should act in conformity with political caution, a significant contrast to the approach of neorealism which emphasised that political actions are largely determined by the structure of the international system. Power and Conflict The second main difference between classical realists and neorealists is found in their opposing views about power and conflict. The former views power as an end in itself, while the latter views power as merely a means to an end (Forde 1995).

Although both strands of realism are united in their view that those involved in politics desire to acquire power, both are in disagreement on why it is the case. In classical realism, the answer is deeply rooted in human nature itself. Hans Morgenthau asserts that humans are born to seek power and enjoy the benefits of it, and that they are by nature 'political animals' (Jackson & Sorensen 2007). In his work in the 'Leviathan', Thomas Hobbs, identified the three main causes of conflict which are basic to human nature: glory, contest, and diffidence (Mingst 2004).

Machiavelli believes that the primary duty of state leaders is to seek the best possible advantages that will ensure the security and survival of their state

and their people (Baylis & Smith 2008). Kenneth Waltz, a leading advocate of neorealism is critical of the classical realists' view on power. He maintains that neorealists do not focus on the human nature like classical realists do, rather they focus on the social and economical factors (Waltz 1988, p. 615). He also maintains that neorealists believe that nations occasionally operate not only for the sake of power.

They see power as a possibly useful means, with states exposing themselves to possible dangers if they have more than enough or very little of it.

Furthermore, while both stands of realism agree on the significance of the balance of power, they do so for contrasting reasons. For advocates of classical realism like Morgenthau, he looked at the balance of power as a direct result of a strong international civilisation (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith 2007, p. 58). Another classical realist in Hedley Bull asserts that the effort to attain a balance of power is mainly to keep the international system in good working order (Brown 2001, p. 10).

However, this philosophy is in direct contrast as to how neorealists view the nature of the balance of power. Waltz, a leading proponent of neorealism, placed great emphasis on the role of political structures in maintaining the balance of power (Donnelly 2007, p. 18). In addition, unlike classical realism, neorealism recognised that it is possible for two states to go on war between one another for reasons not precisely connected to power (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith 2007, p. 78).

Neorealists like Waltz do not believe that human interest for power is the sole and sufficient reason for war, maintaining that other reasons should be taken into consideration (Forde 1995). Classical realists only see power as an end in itself. The Role of Morality The third main difference between both strands of realism is the opposing notion of the role of justice and values in international politics. According to Morgenthau, justice is a very important element to attain an effective society (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith 2007).

Morgenthau said that, ' to do justice and to receive it is an elemental aspiration of man' (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith 2007, p78). David Boucher cites the possible risks when the role of morality and justice is rejected in international relations. According to him, " Unmodified by morality, the individual will maximise utility in conformity with perceived interest. The power to do so with impunity leads to a disregard for moral constraints. The Athenians appealed to the nature of justification of their actions.

It was however, the (belief) that they were above moral constraints both as citizens and as a state, which had disastrous consequences both internally and externally" (Boucher 1998, p. 62). For classical realists, this is an attestation that in international politics, the role of morality is evident and cannot be denied. In contrast, neorealists reject this view, and assert that in international relations, the creation of policy is largely decided by movements of the international system structure (Forde 1995).

Forde is critical on the classical realist's view regarding the probability of the role of morality making a compelling impact on realist thinking. The Role of

Science The fourth main difference between classical and neorealists can be seen in their approaches to the role of science in international politics.

Although both approaches are united in their views of the existence of science in both theories, classical and neorealists argue on the application methods of science in a broader aspect. In classical realism, they view the scientific aspect of their practice as having deep roots in necessity.

To further explain this point, even earlier scholars like Machiavelli and Thucydides cited 'order of things' and 'laws of behaviour' in their texts (Ashley 1984, p. 227). In Hedley Bulls work, he illustrated that the theory of classical realism derives from the conscientious study of law, philosophy, and history (Bull 1966, p. 361). Moreover, he disapproves of the scientific ways used by modern realists, suggesting that all scientific approaches to the study of international relations are basically methods created by classical realists, for instance the confidence of judgments not founded by scientific proofs.

In addition, Bull is also highly critical of Thomas Schelling, a neorealist, who according to Bull created a scientific material for the sake of reinforcing his theories which are equivalently founded on his own judgment. Jackson and Sorensen acknowledged Bull's assessment when they advised that although neorealists like Waltz endeavoured to give international politics a scientific reasoning, they ended up closing their explanation on the 'normative foundations of a traditional realist kind' (Jackson and Sorensen 2007, p. 78).

Why most realists criticise the US Invasion of Iraq in 2003

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, in their article entitled 'An Unnecessary War' published in 2003, advised the Bush Administration regarding the possible risk of US Invasion of Iraq to oust Saddam Hussein from his position (Mearsheimer & Walt 2003). According to the two realists, war-fighting was never the answer to the problem as they believed that the deposition of Hussein could be managed through other methods. However, the Bush Administration was already fixed in their decision, and launched the Operation Iraqi Freedom two months after the article was published.

The main argument on why realists like Mearsheimer and Walt criticised the US invasion of Iraq in early 2003 was that they strongly believe that, containment and deterrence would be the right approach to block Hussein from developing weapons of mass destruction (Mearsheimer & Walt 2003). According to Mearsheimer and Walt, 'the United States can contain Iraq effectively, even if Saddam has nuclear weapons, just as it contained the Soviet Union during the Cold War' (Mearsheimer & Walt 2003).

In other words, both realists never believe that military campaign was the practical way to stop Hussein, as they never really saw him as 'the real challenge' in the Middle East. This belief is seconded in motion by Schmidt and Williams when they said that the US invasion of Iraq would keep them away from focusing and concentrating on the real threat posed by al Qaeda, the search for Osama bin Laden, and the movement against the Taliban in Afghanistan (Schmidt & Williams 2008, p. 202).

The invasion of Iraq through a military campaign was never seen as practical and realistic as there were no active threats targeted towards the national interests of the United States. Another important warning present within the critique of the Iraq War, was the strong dislike against pursuing a 'moralistic foreign policy crusade' (Schmidt & Williams 2008, p. 202), through the liberal notion of spreading democracy. According to the Bush Administration, Islamic nations must become part of President Bush's 'global democratic revolution' and become more like the United States in order to stop terrorism.

The Bush Administration emphasised that Islamic nations such as Iraq should be transformed into a more secular and more democratic society, as they believe that the only attainable solution to Islamic terrorism is the transformation of a society into a more democratized society (Gilpin 2005, p. 6). The aversion of realists against the United States' plan to democratise Iraq heavily corresponds to the harsh critique by Morgenthau half a century earlier. According to Morgenthau, there is a high risk of imposing democracy to parts of the world where there is very little experience of this style of government (Morgenthau 1965).

The local Iraqi population would only view American troops as colonisers which they would fight hard to remove, instead of democratic liberators. This crusade could only embolden the terrorists to increase their nefarious actions, increased the level of insecurity, and a further risk of terrorism in the US. Conclusion In conclusion, it can be seen that realism is not a single theory, but a general approach to international relations. Although there are

varying versions to provide better explanations, realism continues to be one of the foremost and leading approaches in the study of international relations up to this day.

Although classical and neorealists are united in their beliefs of the existence of an anarchic international system and the importance of the balance of power in international system, both realists are in opposition regarding the origin of these factors. Classical realists will carry own looking at power as an end in itself, while neorealists see it as merely a means to an end. Classical realists will persist in seeing moral values being utilised to aid in the acquisition of power, and not the pursuit of power created for the attainment of moral values.

Neorealists, on the other hand, maintain their aversion to the role of morality, but continue to support the role of science in international politics. Furthermore, realists criticised the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 because they never really saw war-fighting as the solution to oust Hussein from his position. They maintain that war in Iraq could only result in more uncertainty and terrorism in the US, thousands of dead people, and mainly anxiety and fear for the future.