

# Theories and characteristics for international systems



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There are many theories have been created from the past until today. Those theories have different characteristics, but some share one another characteristics. Moreover, those theories are popular and well practice in their own period of time. However, those theories share a common goal. The goal is to explain the interaction between the actors in international system. More importantly, Realism is the only theory that capable enough to explain the international relation and international system today. There are four important beliefs or ways of thinking that Realism has in order to strengthen it capability to explain the world relation today: state actor, desire for power and national interest, balance of power, and anarchy international system.

First, in realist point of view state is the main actor in the system compare to other actors. Realists believe that state has one important task, " State is seen as a protector of its territory, of the population, and of their distinctive and valued way of life" (Jackson & Sorensen, 2007). In other word, states make sure their people no longer fear with one another. In the current international system, states are still play important role as the main actors. In the world largest international organization, the United Nations, states are the key actors for continuing the existence of such a big organization. The United Nations need not only the financial resources but also the military voluntary from its member states so that the organization can intervene to any necessary issues. Other actors such as nongovernmental organizations need the permission from the host state for operating their tasks in any particular country. Showing the fact that, states have absolute right to make decisions in their own square of sovereignty. Domestically, states are still in the top position to decide. Even though, civil society's power now is

emerging, it still cannot completely over run the power of states. In Myanmar case, several human right movements were attempted to overthrow the government but in return they had been calmed down, and the government is still exist until today. Moreover, states have the ability to make laws that people have to obey or else they will be punished by the legitimate enforcement of the states since people need states to guarantee their survival from the threat of other people. Therefore, state is still the main actor in the world today as the realism theory explanation on the status of the state.

Second, states in the world today still put more concern on their national interests and have desire for power. States join into the institutions or sign the bilateral or multilateral agreements only because states thought that by doing so, they can reach their national interests. The joining of China, Japan, and United States in ASEAN to create ASEAN plus 3 is nothing but a way of increasing and spreading the square of influence in term of economy. So the three superpowers decided to join in the institution for national interest and benefit for their desire for power only. During the critical points, states will choose their national interests rather than mutual interests or other states interests. During US and Iraq war, the US together with Great Britain ignored the mutual interest of other states in Security Council, and wage war against Iraqi state. Thai government is willing to bear the feeling shame by the international community rather than forget its national interest of getting Preah Vihear Temple. In term of national interest, states share the same interest in desiring for power in today world. All improvements that states made are all for increasing their power. Moreover, states desire for both soft

power in term of economical influence and hard power in term of military capability. As we can see in the early 20th century, many European states colonized other states across the world. By doing so, those European states can extract the natural resources then process them and sell them to gain their power. Moreover, it was happen not only during the early the 20th century but also the 21st century. There are several facts that ensure such a claim. The US is busy spreading its influence to increase its soft power all over the world despite its advanced military capability. The US spread its influence through giving away aids, development assistances and so on. In 2008 there were estimations of about \$26. 8 billion in net official Development Assistance, \$4. 3 billion in Humanitarian aid, and \$4. 8 billion in Economic Support Funds and more (CY2008 U. S. Official Development Assistance to Developing Countries, 2009). China also shares similar perspective on increasing its soft power as the US. However, new emerging power China has more focus in only three part of the world, Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. China spent about 17. 9 billion in Africa, 0. 4 billion in Latin America, and 6. 7 billion for Southeast Asia for Economic Assistance in year 2007 (Lum, 2009). Despite of the hard power limitation of Japan, the state is trying to improve it soft power. Recently, Japan is working hard on lobbying other states to support its position in the permanent member of UNSC due to its large amount of financial contribution to the United Nations. Iran and North Korea are also improving their hard power in term of nuclear capability. Cambodia also improved much on the economic sector compare nowadays with the period after Khmer Rouge. Cambodia's economic power no matter is still not yet highly strong but can be seen as a consideration for neighbor countries to keep in mind. In short, every state in the world is

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struggled to improve their soft and hard power like Realism's explanation on the nature of state.

Third, the balance of power determines today international relation. Previous point was talking about the desire of states for power. And balance of power can serve as one factor that contributes to the desire of power of each state. States never completely believe on other states that why no states can involve in any states domestic affair due to the sovereignty. As a result, states have to keep in mind of their self-defend and need power to protect their sovereignty. The increasing power of one state whether soft or hard power will become threat to other states. In return, those feared states have to improve their power as well in order to protect their national security interests. During the cold war, the United States and the Soviet Union were competing in arm race to ensure their security. Hundreds of Nuclear Arsenals had been created from both sides in order to balance one another, despite of other thousands nuclear weapon carriers. Moreover after the cold war end, the idea of balance of power is still carried out by states. More and more states are trying to improve their military power in order to balance with the old nuclear weapon states as well as with the newly acquiring nuclear capability states. South Africa had six nuclear weapons but disassembled them in 1991; Pakistan exploded its nuclear devices right after India exploded first in 1998 to show the equal of power (Papp, 2002). North Korea is trying to build up their military by improving its nuclear capability to balance with South Korea as the economic and military alliance of the United States. Singapore as a small state surrounded by much bigger neighbors is now having the latest military warfare to ensure its security in the region.

China and United States balance soft power with each other so that no one can highly enjoy higher influence in decision-making to other states. The same as in the past and today, states are trying to balance the power with one another to ensure their national security interest. Therefore, international relation among states and states can be explained by the balance of power approach of Realism.

Fourth, international system of the world today is anarchy. States desire for power, never give up their national interest, along with always concerning of the balance of power lead the international system in the past as well as today to become anarchy. Powerful states are willing to do anything as long as they can reach their national interest. Less powerful states or weak states are also willing to do everything as long as they can maintain their survivor. These factors lead to the ongoing conflict among states and states in the world system. In South China Sea conflict, China never feels reluctant to face conflicts with Southeast Asia states as long as it can achieve its national interest of owning the territory of South China Sea. As a result, several military confrontations happened and caused deaths between China and its old enemy, Vietnam. Concerning of the increasing power in East and Southeast Asia by China if it can own South China Sea, another super power, United States has to step in. United States is willing to spend its assistance to support the conflict parties in the South China Sea conflict as long as it can prevent the increasing of China's power. Consequently, the balance of power between China and Southeast Asia states, with the support of the US, leads to the never ending conflict of South China Sea. Several days ago, North Korea attack one island in South Korea territory due to the fact that

South Korea and United States together do military exercise near North Korea's border. North Korea did not think about negotiation, neither bilateral nor multilateral, but just takes action as soon as it felt the military exercise is threat to its nation. International laws or international community cannot fear the North Korea at all but only can encourage both conflict parties to try to settle down and solve the conflict peacefully. More importantly, the military exercise of South Korea and the U. S. is still continuing. As a result, any miscalculation in decision-making between North Korea and South Korea can lead to the big scale war. War is still continuing in Middle East due to factors such as US invasion of Iraq, US war on terrorism in Afghanistan, and the attempting of Iran to have nuclear weapon. Despite the victory of US over the government of Saddam Hussein, US still is still having hard time in stabilizing the countries. Moreover, US also engage in another war in Afghanistan hoping to decrease the power of non-state actor, terrorist group. Scaring of its national security, US again have to pressure the Iran government to give up the plan of producing nuclear weapon. However, Iran is seemed not ready yet to give up its national interest. Therefore, the tension is still going between the two. The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East are really hard to be at rest. More conflicts in other part of the world are happening as well. In short, the ongoing of conflicts is happened because of the anarchy of international system that states are freely doing what they want. Also, peace in the anarchy international system seems to never exist.

In conclusion, Realism is the only one theory that can best explain the international system today. States are still the main actors and still have the complete power over other actors in the international system. People still

see states as their main mechanism for ensuring their survival. Today world, states still prioritize their national interests rather than other states interests. They are willing to throw away other states' interests rather than their national interests. Moreover, the desire for power is still the main objective for states. Power is important factor that contribute to states' survivor. Therefore, balance of power between states is another main objective for all states in the current international community. Only such a thing as balance of power can ensure states security from external influence and guarantee self-defense. Finally, the status of state as the main actor, desire of state for power together with national interest, and balance of power caused the world system today to be an anarchy system. Existing conflicts cannot be solved, and more conflicts are happening. These facts are all correspond to the characteristic of Realism. So again, Realism is the theory that best describe the world today.