

Realist theories of ir

[Science](#), [Social Science](#)



Realist Theories of International Relations The realist theory of international relation raises concerns on the nature of all politics. The realist theory first acknowledges that the world is rationally imperfect. However it goes further to posit that the world is a result inherent in human nature, which one must work with in order to improve the world. The world as it is inherently a world of opposing interests. According to Morgenthau (1973), political realism is guided by six principles: objectivity, concept of interest defined in power, interest defined as power, awareness of the moral significance of political action, differentiation between truth and opinion, and its intellectual relevance.

The strong point of this view is the accommodation of the element of conflict that exists even within an individual. Human nature is constantly waging war against itself with the desires of a person mostly conflicting with outside influences such as learning. A political realist is holistic in thought because of the acknowledgement of the existence and relevance of standards other than the political ones. The political realist refutes the “ legalistic moralistic approach” to international politics and cannot subordinate standards of other schools of thought to those of politics. The realists vehemently defend the autonomy of the political sphere against its subversion by other modes of thought without disregarding their existence and importance (Morgenthau 14).

Kenneth Waltz also had a realist perspective to international relations which he called neorealism or structural or defensive realism. This theorist used the turmoil inherent in international relations to restrict the global “ net” to its classical international component (Waltz 29). From the neorealist approach

examination of the structures of international systems is the best way to understand international politics. The structures of the international system are reflected alliances and other cooperative arrangements between nations (Mearsheimer 32). The polarity of the system becomes the key factor in international relations; and depending on the number of dominant superpowers, a system might be unipolar bipolar or multipolar.

John Measheimer took a different view which he referred to as “ offensive realism”. Measheimer’s perspective follows on the principles of Kenneth Waltz’s theory to utilize the “ structure” of the international system to derive the behavior of states (Mearsheimer 25). The theoretical foundation of Measheimer outlines that: the international system in anarchic, all states possess some offensive capacity, no state can be sure that another state will not use force against it, great powers are rational actors, and the primal goals of all states are survival, domestic autonomy, and territorial integrity (p. 30-31). In his perspective, the tragedy of politics is embodied in three conclusions: great powers have the incentives to think and act offensively with each other, even nations concerned with own survival may end up pursuing hegemony, and finally, such nations are capable of ending up in war.

The pessimistic approach used by Measheimer finds applicability since the international system is characterized by nations whose intentions are uncertain. In accordance to the belief by Waltz, nations form alliances and other arrangements for their cooperation which constitute the international system (Waltz 10). The two theories of defensive realism and offensive realism by Kenneth Waltz and John Measheimer respectively start out with

similar assumptions but arrive at dissimilar conclusions. The advantage of using realist approaches to understanding international relations or politics is that these theories consider politics to be a competitive interplay of self-interested actors. Waltz believed that most great powers are likely to abuse power against their own interests. This scenario has been repeated in many large nations illustrating its validity.

Works Cited

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