

Realism: survival and war

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Given the fact, and just what history proves, that realism dominated other theoretical traditions or idealisms because of its simple yet powerful explanations for war, alliances, imperialism, obstacles to cooperation and other international phenomena; showing and stating that the prospects for eliminating conflict and war are really pessimistic. In fact, the existence of power, in various manifestations, has become the bedrock or a significant ingredient to be the name of the game while war as its medium to play. As what it significantly implies, realism is all about acquiring and accumulating power for survival. But what if this power is also the threat for survival? given the fact that realism is a world full of superiority complex. Just like what Thucydides, one of the most prominent realists, quoted in his History of Peloponnesian War, “ The real cause I consider to be the one which was formally kept out of sight: The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this in Lacadaemon (Spartas) made the war inevitable.” This obviously says that, realism, as the language expounding the accumulation of power and the answer to the prevalence of conflict and war, shows and proves that states become more selfish and aggressive as they feel threatened or alarmed and overpowered causing, ironically, the birth of war, chaos, and annihilation.

Focusing on the key assumptions of realism; the states as the central actors in international politics rather than its people or international organizations; states as unitary and rational actors of their actions as to the maximization of their own self-interest; the anarchic international system resulting to no supranational authority enforcing law over states; and the strong desire of

states in acquiring power to ensure their own self-preservation, to show how ironic and tragic the theory of realism is.

First, the states as the central actors in international politics rather than its people or international organizations. If realized, there is actually a connection between the three (states, individuals, international organizations). In fact, it is somehow related to what Waltz said that man and state describe the forces in world politics to assess the importance of state system. So, it is clear that these are really connected to each other. Honestly, it is a good thing that there is a central actor in international politics. But what is something alarming about it is the absence of the support or the help of its individuals, most especially by international organizations. The word 'central' can be connoted as the core or the only actor in international politics. But what if, the international organizations, which are specialized in this type of situation can help and resolve conflict without some personal intentions and manipulations? Still, it is a good thing.

Next key assumption is the states as unitary and rational actors of their actions as to the maximization of their own self-interest. The big word here is 'self-interest'. Each states has different 'self-interest': different aims, different plans, motif, and wants. In this case, when a certain state feel threatened or wandered about the other states' plan, that certain state will maximize and invest in its potential power causing an increasing amount of fear and the probability of having a war. This is related to the so-called 'Thucydides trap', the war was driven by fear associated with a shift in the balance of power. Just like what happened to Spartas, as they were afraid of losing its pre-eminent role in the Hellenic role so they took counter-measures

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to strengthen its military force resulting to the beginning of war against the Athens. That is actually true. For instance, an individual is not aware of the motif of a stranger who chatted him or her on Facebook, so he or she will just block that stranger even though he or she is completely not aware of what that stranger wants. That stranger is either good or bad, but whatever that stranger is, countermeasures are needed to not be totally crazy and threatened by other states, especially if that state is growing its power. Remember what Thucydides quoted, “ The real cause I consider to be the one which was formally kept out of sight: The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this in Lacadaemon (Spartas) made the war inevitable.” In addition to support the argument that self-interest can cause fear, Thomas Hobbes said in his Leviathan, Chapter 13, “ In all times, kings and persons of sovereign authority, because of their independence, are in continual jealousies, and in the state and posture of gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; that, their forts, garrisons, and guns upon their neighbors; which is a posture of war.” But the fact is, both states are actually punished, not rewarded, so there is no really a winner and a loser.

Third key assumption is the anarchic international system resulting to no supranational authority enforcing law over states. The anarchic type of system refers to no authority to regulate power and relationship between states. Imagine living in this kind of society. No laws. No rules. No violations. No punishment. Isn't it a kind of society wherein chaos and bloodshed are the ultimate kings and queens? In regards to this, it just shows that it is not actually a good picture of a society and an environment. This is one of the

negative things that realism has to offer. Due to the intense and heinous accumulation of power for survival, some people, especially those who are really greedy to power, tend to kill people and spread crime all over the place to spread fear. When there is fear, there should be someone who will act as a Superhero to calm people but the reality is, that Superhero is actually the one who threatens the lives of people, manipulating them to support him and praise him. Usually, these are government officials. Seriously. Going back to the topic, when there is no law existing, there will be no abuse of power and morality will eventually vanished, though politics has no relation to morals, common-good is still the common goal.

Lastly is the strong desire of states in acquiring power to ensure their own self-preservation. To make it short, since some states want to acquire power while some are not, the threat is still existing between the balance of power. If a certain state wants more and more power, the equilibrium will be threatened and so other states will attack the supreme power, so there is no self-preservation at all. Again, both parties are affected, there is no winner and loser, they are just deeply affected. Each state has something to lose. Each state has something to sacrifice. Each state has something to give up. History has shown it already, that too much accumulation of power is not really for survival, it is actually for annihilation.

Realism, as the language expounding the accumulation of power and the answer to the prevalence of conflict and war, shows and proves that states become more selfish and aggressive as they feel threatened or alarmed and overpowered causing, ironically, the birth of war, chaos, and annihilation. As some states want to achieve more power for survival, that state will be more

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and more the subject of threat and fear. Fear. A simple word, but it can really make the lives of people turn into death, a solemn place into a chaotic place. If realism expounds power as a medium of survival, can it still say that there is survival if there are numerous cases of deaths, famine and destruction? Survival is not the ability of the state to stand, rather the presence of life.