

## MORGENTHAU AND REALISM

Political realism in IR reached its zenith and assumed a grotesque stature in the hands of Hans J. Morgenthau in his seminal work *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1948). His six principles or signposts are:

1. Politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature which is unchanging. Therefore, it is possible to develop a rational theory that reflects these objective laws.
2. The main signpost of political realism is the concept of interest defined in terms of power which infuses rational order into the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible. Morgenthau views international politics as a process in which national interests are accommodated or resolved on the basis of diplomacy of war. He upheld that "The concept of national interest presupposes neither a naturally harmonious, peaceful world nor the inevitability of war as a consequence of the pursuit by all nations of their national interests. Quite to the contrary, it assumes continuous conflict and threat of war to be minimized through the continuous adjustment of conflicting interest by diplomatic action".
3. Realism assumes that interest defined as power is an objective category which is universally valid but not with a meaning that is fixed once and for all. In a world in which sovereign states compete for power, survival constitutes the minimum goal of foreign policy and the core national interest. The protection of "their physical and cultural identity against encroachments by other nations" constitutes the vital interest which is common to all states. Therefore, the basic minimum national interest identifiable is national survival and other interests are determined by the requirements of time, place, culture, socio-economic and political condition of the states.

To support his argument, Morgenthau gives classic examples from history. One such is the policy of Great Britain in 1939-40 towards Finland which, he says, was not based on legalistic-moralistic foundations but backed by massive military aid on the face of Soviet aggression that might have backfired on Britain's survival only. It

would have faced destruction in the hands of Nazi Germany and would not have been able to restore the independence of Finland thus endangering its vital national interest, i.e., national survival. Morgenthau remarks asking: When the national interest related to national survival has been safeguarded, can nations pursue lesser interests?

4. Universal moral principles cannot be applied to state action. They must be filtered through concrete circumstances of time and place. To confuse individual morality with state morality is to court disaster, as states in pursuit of their national interest are governed by a morality that is different from the morality of individuals in their personal relationships.
5. Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe. It is the concept of interest defined in terms of power that saves us from the moral excess and political folly.
6. The political realist maintains the autonomy of the political sphere.<sup>[12]</sup>

Therefore, this Hobbesian, Machiavellian and Kautilyan understanding of human nature, as selfish and conflictual unless given appropriate conditions, has been successfully adopted, internalized and transformed into a modern theory of international relations. During the Cold War it became the most widely accepted perspective of world politics. As Rothenstein<sup>[13]</sup> pointed out, realism became the "doctrine which provided the intellectual frame of reference for the (US) foreign policy establishment for something like twenty years... it did determine the categories by which they assessed the external world and the state of mind with which they approached prevailing problems". Realism prevailed as the dominant paradigm with its emphasis on the autonomy of political action and the "billiard ball" model in IR till it was challenged by the behavioural revolution. But it again re-emerged in the form of neo-realism in the 1970s.

### NEO-REALISM

The realist tradition suffered a setback due to the emergence of the neo-liberal thought, especially the challenge posed by 'pluralism'. State-centrism of the traditional realists received a serious jolt as pluralists emphasized the fact that the state may be a significant actor in international relations but it is not the sole actor. In other words, they acknowledged a plurality of actors in international relations as will be discussed just now. The pluralist's challenge to realism was soon met by a new brand of realists, and the forerunner among them was Kenneth Waltz. Waltz in his famous works, Man, the State and War (1959) and

<sup>\*</sup>R. Rothenstein, "on the Costs of Realism", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No. 3, 1972, p. 38.

*Theory of International Politics* (1979), came up with his idea of world politics which is popularly known as **neo-realism**. Waltz argues that the key difference between international and domestic politics lies not in the regularity of war and conflict but in the **structure** of international system. In the absence of higher authority in the **international** system, there is no other way to secure oneself other than **self-help** which will ultimately lead to **security dilemma** because security build-up of one would lead to insecurity of others. The resultant anarchy for the neo-realists is, therefore, due to the presence of a system characterized by the absence of a higher power over the sovereign states. It is this structure of international system which decisively shapes up the behaviour of states in international relations and their struggle for power. Thus, the sources of conflict or causes of war, unlike what the traditional or classical realists argue, do not rest on the human nature but within the basic framework of the anarchic structure of international relations. Waltz uses game theory (an economic concept which is widely used in many fields today) in addressing the balance of power and self-help in this environment. He says that balance of power results in this kind of a system irrespective of the intentions of a particular state. But in international politics, in the absence of authority to effectively prohibit the use of force, the balance of power among states becomes most often a balance of capabilities, including physical force, which states choose to use in pursuing their goals. Thus, in a self-help system, the logic of self-interest provides a basis of understanding the problem of coordinating the interests of individual versus the interests of the common good and the pay-off between short-term interests and long-term interests.<sup>[14]</sup> Neo-realists did not overlook the prospects of cooperation among states also. But the point of contention was that, states, while cooperating with each other, tried to maximize their relative power and preserve their autonomy.

### Criticisms

The first major criticism which can be levelled against realism is that like idealism, realism is also lopsided and stresses solely on power and power struggle, i.e., 'power monism'. The traditional realists formulated their views in reaction to the liberal utopians of the 1920s and 1930s. Consequently, they put greater emphasis on 'power politics', state sovereignty, balance of power and war. For the realists, states were the only important actors in international relations. Besides, scholars point out that Morgenthau's realism was based on *a priori* assumptions about human nature, such as the rational pursuit of self-interest, utility maximization and the like, which are hardly verifiable and tested. Benno Wasserman, Robert Tucker, Stanley Hoffman and others have criticized traditional realism on the ground, that it is neither realistic nor consistent with itself. According to Stanley Hoffman<sup>[15]</sup>, this theory is full of anomalies and ambiguities and ignores the discussion of ends. Quincy Wright observed that the realist theory has ignored the impact of values on national

policy. Robert Tucker criticized the theory because he thought it was inconsistent both with itself and with reality. Vasquez (1979) contends that a statistical analysis of international relations would reveal that though there was overwhelming dominance of realist paradigm in the 1950s and 1960s, but it failed to adequately explain international politics. According to the findings, over 90 per cent of the 7000 realist hypotheses were falsified. Linklater (1990) opined that there is a need to go beyond the structural realists' emphasis on constraints and the liberal realists' predilection for order, in order to develop an emancipatory form of theory which seeks to deepen the sense of solidarity and widen the bonds of community in global politics. Neo-realism is also not without flaws as Linklater has pointed out that a major problem with Waltz's unit-structure relationship is that it leaves little or no room for systemic change induced by the units themselves.<sup>[16]</sup> He further argues that by emphasizing recurrence and repetition in the international system, neo-realism cannot envisage a form of statecraft which transcends the calculus of power and control. Cox (1986) places the neo-realist theory in the category of 'problem-solving approach' to international relations when this may be little more than a cover for and rationalization of immoral and unethical behaviour. By deconstructing realism, neo-realism and neo-liberalism, post-modern critical theory observes that the concept of inter-state anarchy is in reality an artificial construction of the dominant discourse and the state practices associated with it. It is contrived and generated by the dominant international relations discourse.<sup>[17]</sup>

There has also been a feminist critique of realist theory from the point of exclusion of the women throughout the whole discourse. The most common motif in feminist analyses of peace and war depicts masculinity as a transcendently aggressive force in society and history. Women are bystanders or victims of men's wars. Most feminist commentary, through the 1980s, followed this framework. In particular, the extraordinary outburst of concern over the nuclear threat in the 1970s and early 1980s resulted in a spate of feminist writings explicitly or implicitly founded on a critique of masculinist militarism. In her appraisal of Hans J. Morgenthau, for instance, Tickner (1988) criticizes realism as only "a partial description of international politics", owing to its deeply embedded masculinist bias. But partial descriptions are partial descriptions; they are not dead wrong. Tickner attacks Morgenthau's paradigm on several grounds. But her main concern is to offer a *feminist reformulation* of certain realist principles. In a similar vein, the central problem may not be with objectivity as such, but with objectivity "as it is culturally defined ... [and] associated with masculinity". The idea of the "national interest" likewise needs to be rendered more "multidimensional and contextually contingent", but not necessarily abandoned. Tickner stresses: "I am not denying the validity of Morgenthau's work" but only asking for a negotiation with the 'contentious others'.<sup>[18]</sup>