

To what extent is International Relations theory useful for policymakers and practitioners in dealing with change in world politics?

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Abstract: *International relations theory is a composition of various thoughts and theoretical schools developed since the end of the 19th century, aiming to establish a framework for analyzing international relations. As the post-war regime and globalization have rapidly transformed international relations, international relations are essential for establishing national and global policies. This article will analyze the three classic international relations theory schools of realism, liberalism, and constructivism one by one to explore how these theories can achieve global peace and the stability of the international system.*

Keywords: *International Relations Theory, Liberalism, realism, Constructivism, world politics*

1. Introduction

International relations theory is a composition of the various school of thoughts and theories developed since the late 19th century to create a framework from which international relations can be analyzed. With the rapid shift in international relations from the post-war regimes and globalization international relations are crucial in the establishment of state and global policies. The main aim of international relations theory was to provide a scope through which we can analyze our environment broadly from different points of view (Brown, 2017). It seeks to analyze past international relations and current relations and predict future relations. In view of the latter international relations seeks to address societal issues that cut across the border and affect the globe as a whole. It encompasses international security, diplomatic relations, state sovereignty, ecological stability, global finance, terrorism and human rights (Marchant, 1955). In view of the issues addressed by international relations and the strides made since their development it is safe to note that it has contributed mainly to successful diplomatic interactions between different world factions, this has played a crucial role in globalization and peaceful interaction across the state and continental borders. Since international relations covers and focusses on vital global issues, it has proved essential in providing the road map to amicable resolutions to disputes and global resource distribution which has enabled growth and development in most parts of the globe.

International relations theory borrows from various philosophical schools which differ in ideologies and contrast in their general view of international relations and what they should be. The three fundamental theories that this paper will analyze include: realism, which views world politics as a necessary area of conflict among the involved actors pursuing power which is a contrast of liberalism and its ideals. The latter shares views of liberal and peaceful interactions in good faith through international organizations which are a vital player in globalization. Lastly, constructivism, which is also a key contributor to international relations theory, argues that international relations are a subject of history and social constructs rather than the inevitable outcomes of human nature or essential aspects of global politics (Brown, 2017).

2. Contributions of international relations theory to policymaking in a changing political landscape.

2.1 Realism

Realism is the main contributor to international relations theory, as is evident by global and regional political organizations like the United Nations and the European Union. Realism thus emphasizes on the conflictual and competitive aspect of global politics. It thus uses that ideal in establishing a framework of policies that help address what is considered by realists the root of global instability between different

sovereignties. Earlier forms of realism thus tend to be characterized as a reaction against interwar idealist thinking following the effects of world war 11 (Rösch, 2011).

Realism insists on the need for policies and regulations arising from the unregulated competition of states. Based on the latter, states are unitary sovereign factions that look to gain and benefit themselves or the leading political figureheads depending on the prevailing political structures (Greener, 2012). This being the case, there is bound to be competition for resources and power as a survival strategy. Realism advocates the establishment of policies and regulations that promote an agreed-upon fair system that maintains stability, peace and fosters growth. International relations have largely borrowed from this school of thought despite the assumptions that: firstly, states are the most important actors in an international system, secondly, the main focus of states is their survival and that all sovereignties within the globe are unitary rational actors. Despite its various shortcomings and contrast with other significant schools of thought realism has mostly contributed to international relations and some of the policies and regulations that have shaped the current world order as we see it today (Assiter, 2013).

International relations have contributed to transparency and disclosure in the international system by enabling the development of policies that campaign for transparency in a state's activity as a way of reducing suspicion and hostility between states. Therefore, these relations foster accountability and openness in a state's progress to ensure the survival of its citizens. However, the latter has had its fair share of challenges and setbacks with regards to the anarchic nature of the international system, states are not answerable to any authority and still maintain the freedom to pursue its goals regardless. This was demonstrated when Iran denied United Nations inspection officers access to all their nuclear sites, which led to aroused suspicion from several other states despite their claims to be doing it for the general good of its citizens.

Realism recognizes all countries as sovereign entities. The adoption of this notion in international relations was vital in facilitating the achievement of independence post world war 11, especially on the African continent. This was a significant milestone in improving the then damaged nature of international relations, which provide the very backbone of the most successful global organization that has to be at the forefront of establishing and maintaining sustainable globalization relationships. This, however, did not eliminate hostility and suspicion between former colonizers and colonies, and thus the presence of societal conflicts subject to some society demographics like race (Chernoff, 2007).

International relations helped restore order to chaotic system subject to a previous poor and unorganized system that facilitated the slave trade and colonization. Since the damage is already done, the level of order as a result of international relations has enabled individuals to understand their origins subject to the current conditions of international relations.

International relations, subject to neo-realism, understands both the failures and success of power balance. Through use of deductive procedures and data collected over time across different spaces, we can identify, measure and analyze patterns that will help predict future expectations. Understanding the importance of power balance international relations have been able to provide policymakers with a framework to establish policies that promote power balance and maximize partnerships and productive collaborations for the entire system as a whole(Greener, 2012).

Despite its contribution to international relations and modern schools of thought like neo-realism, realism itself is relatively inflexible and unaccommodative to the ever-growing and rapidly changing nature of international relations. Instead of using history as a point of reference, realist should borrow from other schools of thought and embrace new philosophies like green theory. Rather than focus on the individuality of sovereignties, they should focus on individual citizens of the globe. And rally frameworks for policies that will enable collective responsibility in caring for one another and surviving as an ecological system instead of an archaic system that is subject to individual state goals. In as much as unitary rationale acting is associated with realism, evidence points to unintended effects on the globe as a whole; global warming is an excellent example of the latter.

2.2 Liberalism

The first time that liberalism emerged was in the 18th century as the world searched for a new peaceful world order. The theory, which emphasizes the importance of an individual's right to life, liberty, and property are met (Meiser, 2018). To accomplish this, the theory believes that the government is required to ensure that the rights of the individual are not violated. However, the theory also recognizes that the government also poses a threat to the individual's liberty since concentrations of unaccountable violent power are the main threats to liberty (Girvetz & Dagger, 2020). Consequently, the main aim of this theory

is to construct a system that gives the government enough power to be able to protect its individual's rights and liberty and at the same time preventing the government from abusing its power. This can be possible by ensuring that there are institutional checks of power in liberal states. The primary way to do this is through free and fair elections. This allows people to choose the leaders they believe are capable and remove those that are not doing the job well, which assists in keeping the government in check. Another vital way to keep the government from abusing its power is the division of power across different branches, which allows balances in the usage of power, (Meiser, 2018). The liberals compared to realists- are optimistic and believe that despite that anarchy of the world, most nations are not at war most of the time and they would rather not be at war but rather cooperate towards common interests. The liberalism theory contributes to international relations through the following factors: Democratic peace theory- This is also known as liberal internationalism. This theory states that democratic states are unlikely to go to war. This is probably a result of the fact that democratic states usually have internal restraints of power. Furthermore, democratic states do not usually see each other as threats; hence they are usually more willing to work together towards common goals rather than go to war. This theory was proven further by a series of articles by Doyle, who compiled a list of liberal states from 1700-1982 and a list of interstate from 1816-1980, (Cavelty et al., 2012). His findings showed that no two democracies had engaged in a full-scale war.

Commercial peace theory- this is also known as liberal commercialism. This theory states that trade together is highly unlikely to go to war with each other. This is since war would disrupt their trade practices which would result in losses for both parties. Thus, states that have trade ties usually strive to have peaceful cooperation.

Institutional peace theory- This is also known as liberal institutionalism. This theory states that international institutions are likely to increase the probability of cooperation (Cavelty et al., 2012). They provide an international system that is beyond the borders of just one state with a set of rules to govern them. For instance, institutions like the United Nations, which also takes part in mediations and conflict resolutions for different states. As well as pooling resources to contribute to help solve global problems such as climate change and world poverty.

The world today is very different from what it was. Currently, globalization of the world has increased, and it does not seem to be changing soon. Due to the increased use of technology, more states are interacting with their neighbors and in some situations acting as one entity. This has led to the need for more international policies to govern these international relations. Policymakers use international relations theories when finding solutions to global issues. Theories like liberalism influence how policymakers' and practitioners' understand the world and their perceptions of state behaviors. Knowledge of liberalism has proved quite useful, especially with the current globalization of the world. This theory, which puts quite a lot of emphasis on cooperation and democracy amongst states, is an important tool in our current world. Policymakers and practitioners can use it in creating policies that will promote trade and interdependence among liberal states. It can also be used to push the agenda of democracy in states, which assist in establishing strong diplomatic relations. Liberalism leads to policies designed to increase international cooperation through international bodies and trade. However, though democracies tend not to fight each other, they are likely to have a savior's complex and try to save states with authoritarian regimes leading to conflict and wars such as the wars between the United States and Middle East countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

In conclusion, though liberalism has been considered utopian and unrealistic by International Relations scholars, its theories if executed well can lead to a more peaceful world with less war and more partnerships between liberal states. It is quite a useful tool that will assist policymakers to have a better understanding of the state's purpose and thus assist in helping them create policies that will help push this agenda.

2.3 Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory that focuses on social facts such as sovereignty and rights. Which have no material aspects but are at the core of shared ideational forces among people to conclude that the various actors are shaped by the environment in which they are. While centering on social life and social change, it explores the role of discourse, norms, culture and ideas on social life. While using this as a basis, it argues that different situations need to be analyzed from their different perspectives in order to grasp the full picture (Onuf & Klink, 1989).

International relations have dramatically benefited from the theory of constructivism. The theory has enabled researchers as well as world actors to have an objective view of the situation of things and make

accurate decisions. Alexander Wendt (1995), for example, uses the theory to reason out that 5 North Korean nuclear weapons would be more dangerous than 500 British ones from the perspective of the United States. This includes taking into account consideration the social relationships between the countries, which is perceived in the same way by all the three countries. The theory has thus provided for the inclusion of the effects of ideas and beliefs on world politics to understand it better and act accordingly.

Complex national bureaucracies such as foreign offices have relied heavily on the theory to make foreign policies which aim at protecting and maximizing national interest. The organizations thus try to align their interests with those of the country securing personal political and material benefits. The theory has therefore provided a basis for interest construction and analysis of the impact, with regards to the influence of supranational bureaucracies such as multinational corporations and non-governmental organizations.

Constructivism has come up with cross-level models which give emphasis to the interplay between developments, agents and structures at the regional, national and international levels. Such an example is where human rights are in consideration as it is at the intersection of the multitude of policies adopted by domestic human rights activists. Who are continuously pushing the government to enforce them, international Non-Governmental Organizations, states who make policies that touch on rights and regional actors too? Constructivism has thus theorized the mechanisms connecting the various international and national actors as well as their policies heavily shaping their foreign policies (Hopf, 1998).

Constructivism has in this manner significantly affected the institution of sovereignty requiring that states not violate each other. Another implication on the state foreign policy is on the nature of rational behavior. This is since the theory considers that, unlike in old times, where rivals treated each other as enemies fighting any dispute out (Grant, 2018). Rivals, as compared to enemies, are less worried about the threats to their national security and survival and thus tend to formulate foreign policies based on long term goals and advantages, which might accrue from cooperating prioritizing absolute gains over the potential losses feared by enemy countries who tend to make foreign policies based on high-risk aversion and short term goals. Another implication for state foreign policy is that the military power of state actors, unlike before in the Hobbesian world does not dominate all the decision making and is thus less of a priority because, as Wendt puts it, threats are not existential. As there is a very high likelihood that disputes will be resolved through dialogue as compared to violence, rivals will mostly show self-restraint in violence. Wendt notes that rivals, as well as enemies, might be equally prone to violence but a small difference in roles makes a big difference in its degree.

We can correctly argue that according to constructivism, foreign policy decisions of states are products of discursive factors as well as socio-cultural constructions such as identities which form the bases of interests. Interests which do not exist out of context but are defined in the process of defining situations. It is such identities combined with the social and political situations as well as mutual understandings that determine the interests and the foreign policies (guzzini, 2000).

Constructivism has had its fair share of criticism. It has been argued that too much agency is assumed given the social theory which it rests. This is because it foregrounds discursive structures as the sources of identities rather than individual preferences or material calculations. This agency creates another problem which is a very high expectation for change and too much attention to reflective sources of change rather than practical ones. Constructivism has also written out the findings of psychology, denying it the very foundations that make social constructivism a compelling approach.

While the social role is in the interest of states, while compared with survival, security, and prosperity, it is subordinate. Such weaknesses can be addressed by, for example, grounding identities on individual preferences which would reflect better the state of affairs. Alternatively, actors could use material calculation tools and use such results to come up with structures correctly. The theory should also take into account the findings of various disciplines, especially psychology. This will enable researchers and actors to analyze social factors correctly and thus, better policies.

Constructivism has also been argued to provide an approach which can be used to explain the international political economy. However, it can be no more than a method as it does not offer an essential theory of world politics (Rezaei, 2012). It should, therefore employ various theories from other disciplines such as comparative politics and social psychology.

3. Conclusion

In summary, despite the numerous contrast in the theories that do contribute to the international relation theory. They all aim to accomplish equity and fairness across the border by presenting a conceptual framework upon which change and development inducing policies can be established to actualize and realize a future where the international system works for the well of all its inhabitants. Realism emphasizes state sovereignty by engaging states with each other to foster amicable relations that will benefit all involved parties, it has been implemented overtime and has had considerable impact on the global international relations. Liberalism is rejection of the hostile power politics that it sights realism to be and instead focuses on international cooperation through multinational organizations which cut national borders. Through this partnerships and collaboration and better problems solving methods that provide amicable solutions for any conflicting factions. Constructivism hints at current social structures as having being shaped overtime by history and social constructs rather than being a mere result of the inevitable consequence of human nature which is the main idea supporting realism. Thus despite the contrast in ideologies international relations has borrowed from all this schools of thought in different parts to present a framework upon which policy maker can base their policies in a sustainable manner for the international community.

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