

The Philosophical Foundation of the Realist Security Paradigm

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Abstract

Security and survival are the inborn justifiable rights of every individual in a society. To safeguard life, honour, identity and wealth in a state, men had devised various schemes and strategies according to their milieus and needs in different times. The phenomenon of security is always interpreted by different thinkers according to their understandings. This gave impetus to various theories, like liberalism/idealism, neo-liberalism, realism, neo-realism, constructivism, feminist theory, critical theory, etc.

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Introduction

Theory plays a crucial role in the formulation, understanding and solution of a research problem. Theory is a building block for a research. Theories are set of logically related symbols that represent what we think happens in the world.¹ According to Sjoberg and Nett, theory ‘refers to a set of logically interrelated propositions or statements that are empirically meaningful’, as well as to assumptions the researcher makes about his method and his data’.² There is an intimate connection between theory and research which cannot be neglected. Theory helps the researcher to explore new intellectual gaps and avenues, and research confirms or verifies previous findings, and enriches theory.³ As David Easton says, ‘theory and empirical research goes together’.⁴ On the utility of theory, Scott Burchill says:

*Theory is the composite of guiding principles which guide the researcher to pick up what is fit to his research area and to spurn what is irrelevant. It works for the researcher like beacon, lens or a filtration machine in the selection of materials or data.*⁵

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The security theories fall in two broad paradigms, traditional and non-traditional security paradigms. In traditional paradigm, the advocates emphasises on the security of state or military security. Contrary to this, the non-traditionalist school of security emphasises on the security of other than state. Here one of the dominant security theories of traditional paradigm will be highlighted on philosophical basis.

Realist Security Paradigm

The theory of realism and its various stands have brought tremendous changes on the world scene. Realist security paradigm has its roots in various manifestations. The advocates of realism perceive security from their own lenses.

Classical realists view state or military security fundamental and consider human nature as evil and responsible for war. The strategic thinkers of Greece, Rome, India, and China have also penned about their views of security of state which may be found in conformity with realist paradigm.⁶ Classical realists are usually considered as a reaction liberal approaches to international politics.⁷

Greek realist philosopher, Thucydides⁸ viewed the security of state as essential in nature. It needs to protect from both internal and external enemies. Thucydides said that the powerful state can easily manipulate the behaviour of the weaker state.⁹ To be a powerful state, it needs to increase internal capabilities, gaining economic powers and to enter into alliances with countries of homogenous interests.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that Thucydides emphasised state or military security threats and ignored the other aspects/dimensions of security. In other words, he did not bring to light the non-traditional security threats to state.

St. Augustine portrayed very pessimistic view of human nature. He went a step forward to add fundamental assumption that the nature of man is imperfect, self-centred and self-seeking.¹¹ Andrew Heywood, while commenting on St. Augustine's famous work, that is, the City of God, says:

The City of God draws the connection between Church and the state. It gives details about the secular world and spiritual world. Those who are spiritual and have attachment with commandments of God will get salvation and will enter into paradise. Contrary to this, in the secular life, there is no everlasting salvation but it is abominable.¹²

Indian philosopher, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* had also highlighted principles of realism and emphasised on security of state. Seabury says, '*Arthashastra*' is mainly focussed on the survival and expansionism of boundaries of the country.¹³ Adding to this, Haslam states:

*The central piece of Kautilya's philosophy is that the prospective captor always seeks to augment his supremacy at the cost of the rest of his opponents.*¹⁴

Niccolo Machiavelli is also known for his traditional concept of security. To him, all human beings are inherently not virtuous. They do not believe in benignity.¹⁵ Machiavelli considers a unique code of conduct for the ruler which is not applied on the common citizen. The ruler can set aside all sort of moral values for the protection of state.¹⁶ He gives guideline to ruler to be watchful regarding the possible threats to his private security and the security of the state. He also encouraged the exercise of alliances with states of same interest and a range of offensive and defensive strategies to defend state.¹⁷

Thomas Hobbes is also of the view that war and conflict in the society is the result of negative propensities in human being. He has depicted a very cynical picture of the nature of man and applied the same to state. To him, man by nature is selfish, brutish, egoistic, cunning and aggressive. In the society in which he lives is anarchic in nature because here is 'all against all'. There is constant warfare. In the Hobbes's state of nature there is anarchy and no controlling agency to restrain human from mutual clashes and to restore tranquillity in the society. He considered man's life in the state of nature as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.¹⁸ Hobbes depicted a state of international anarchy, where the norm for states is "having their weapons pointing and their eyes fixed on one another."¹⁹

French scholar, Raymond Aron's²⁰ approach towards security is also traditional and focused on military and state security. For Aron, foreign policy is constituted by diplomatic-strategic behaviour, and international relations takes place under the shadow of sword. By this, he did not mean that war was always likely, but that the legitimacy of violence to secure state goals was shared among states and it could not be monopolized as it had been within the territorial boundaries of the state. In his most famous phrase, international relations are 'relations between political units, each of which claims the right to take

justice into its own hands and to be the sole arbiter of the decision to fight or not to fight'.²¹

Edward Hallett Carr²² recommended that scholars and diplomats could have avoided some of the problems of the interwar period if they had adopted a less idealistic and more 'realistic' approach to international affairs. He makes distinction between domestic and international politics like other realists. He is also of the view that anarchy prevails in international politics. This is why, there is lack of harmony in the world.²³ Carr's work is popular for criticism on theory of liberalism or idealism. He critically took into account the very basic postulate of realist security paradigm which advocates the separation of ethics from international politics.²⁴ E. H. Carr states:

A healthy political thought should be rested on two fundamental factors, i.e., utopia (values) and reality (power). Utopianism is no more an acceptable paradigm, because it serves as a cover for the interests of the privileged, while the realist performs a necessary unclocking it. However, realism in its acme is nothing but a thirst for capturing more power that will make any sort of international society a far cry.²⁵

Carr like his predecessors also talks of nothing but war, security and self-help. He states:

*The use of power always creates an insatiable urge in its user to maximise his capability...conflicts which once start for gaining and ensuring security, turns into conflicts of violence and selfishness.*²⁶

Samuel P. Huntington has exercised enormous influence on international relations and comparative politics. What makes Huntington such a unique and influential thinker is his ability to frame the changing dynamics of international politics in elegant and often intriguing ways. It is largely because of his focus on power and conflict that his work remains closely tied to realism in international politics. In fact, both conservatism and realism focus on the preservation and promotion of existing social and power relations and the need to understand the inevitable qualities of war.²⁷ To him, conflict in future will be cultural and not economic or ideological. There will be clash of civilizations. Civilization is the all-embracing, consisted of various classes of people, having religious, linguistic, historical, cultural, and traditional affinities.²⁸

George Frost Kennan also contributed in the realist security paradigm. He was found as a hard-headed critic of

American external policy during the Cold War. Rather to build a new theory in international relations, he attempted to take appraisal of the role of a diplomat based on realist principles of international politics.²⁹ Like Hans Morgenthau, Kennan also omits the concept of morality from the realm of international politics and foreign policy.³⁰ He argues:

*The 'primary obligation' of any government 'is to the interests of the national society it represents' and that therefore 'the same moral concepts are no longer relevant to it'*³¹

Stephen Krasner's contribution in broadening the horizons of security paradigm is not less than any other realist thinker. It is a settled fact that he shares the hard core concepts, the anarchical nature of world system, self-help phenomenon and rationality of the state, with his realist comrades. However, he introduced a novel postulate in realist paradigm that a state being a rational actor should mobilise its resources so as to counter the external threats.³² He is also of the view that a strong and technologically developed state will seek new market for the consumption of its goods and for this it will require free trade mechanism.³³

Hans Morgenthau argues that there is consistent ambitious for gaining maximum power among political men who are inherently selfish and greedy. Politics in all its manifestations is nothing but only continues endeavour for gaining power to influence the behaviour of others and to dominate whenever it is essential. In global politics, the concept of ethics is alien to foreign policy of a state. It cannot be applied in the relations among states when their interests clash with each other. In other words, morality is a means to an end and not vice versa in international politics.³⁴

The classical realists depicted a dismal image of human nature, i.e. the appetite for war, for dominant role the world in the absence of global controlling authority or mechanism.³⁵ For classical realists, international politics can be characterized as evil: bad things happen because the people making foreign policy are sometimes bad.³⁶ In other words, it is a philosophy that international system is anarchic and that each state must protect its own vital interests, political independence and territorial sovereignty at any cost.³⁷ This anarchical and self-serving character of the nation-states forces them to follow expansionist foreign policies.³⁸

Kenneth Waltz & renaissance of Realism: Structural Realism

Structural/Neo-Realism also has commonalities with classical realism in principles of anarchy, rationality, security, and survival of the state. The uniqueness of neorealism lies in the fact that emphasises on the structure of the international system rather than human nature unlike the classical realists.³⁹

Kenneth Waltz is known for structural realism. His famous work '*Theory of International Politics (1979)*' has gained currency with its publication. Waltz states:

Every system is consisted of a particular structure and their interacting units. Each political structure possesses three basic pillars, i.e., principle of order, nature of the units, and the division of capabilities.⁴⁰ The international system revolves around the structure, which is shaped by the strengths of a state in the world community. The global structure exercises influence over the behaviour of state. This structure also restricts its behaviour and not vice versa. The structure also regulates and directs the results. The capabilities of a state determine its status in the structure of a particular system.⁴¹

Fundamentals of Structural Realism

Kenneth Waltz has laid the foundation of neo-realism on these contestations:⁴² First, the international system is anarchic. Second, in international system the interacting units (states) are unitary and rational. Finally, that survival is the crucial apprehension of all states. K. Waltz regards the principle of anarchy and self-help as fixed in nature. The principle of division of capabilities of states is not fixed but changing.

Strands of Structural Realism

Stephen Walt divides the new generation of structural realists into two broad camps – offensive neo-realists and defensive neo-realists.⁴³

Offensive neo-realists consider the world as competitive and war-laden. This camp of structural realist emphasises on the accelerating maximum power of a state to counter any future threat from its competitor. John Mearsheimer is the clearest proponent of offensive neorealism. He has highlighted the uncertainty of international politics and the issue of rationality of state. Mearsheimer argues:

The international system is unpredictable. In such ambivalent milieu, the state may counter with danger of harm on part any other mighty state. The state has no other option except to augment its capabilities and to acquire much power than its rival states so as to ensure its security and survival.⁴⁴

Mearsheimer pleads the concept of hegemony in a system. He discusses global as well as regional hegemony of a state. However, in the absence of either of this kind of hegemony, the state needs to struggle to augment its wealth and defence power for fighting ground wars.⁴⁵ He also suggests ways and means to capture resources for strengthening the muscles of the state. To him, state's maximum power means state's guarantee of security and hegemony.⁴⁶ He relegates the significance of cooperation, role of the international institutions and that of the alliances.

Mearsheimer founded his theory on the principle of anarchy, offensive defence power of the great power, uncertainty about opponent state's intentions, survivalism as basic aim of great powers; and rationality of great powers.

Defensive Neorealism Security Paradigm

The concept of security of state is common in all strands of realism. Offensive realists emphasise on expansionism, jingoism, and hegemonic strategy. Contrary to this, the advocates of defensive neorealist security paradigm adopt a different stance and urge for obtaining as much power as required for the defence of a state. It negates expansionism and hegemony.

Defensive realists show optimism unlike offensive realists' pessimism. The former is optimistic about cooperation among 'Status Quo' states because such states have no designs to dominate each other. However, cooperation is not possible among 'Revisionist States' because they have avariciousness to dominate the strategic environment for themselves. In other words, revisionist states enter into competition for dominance.

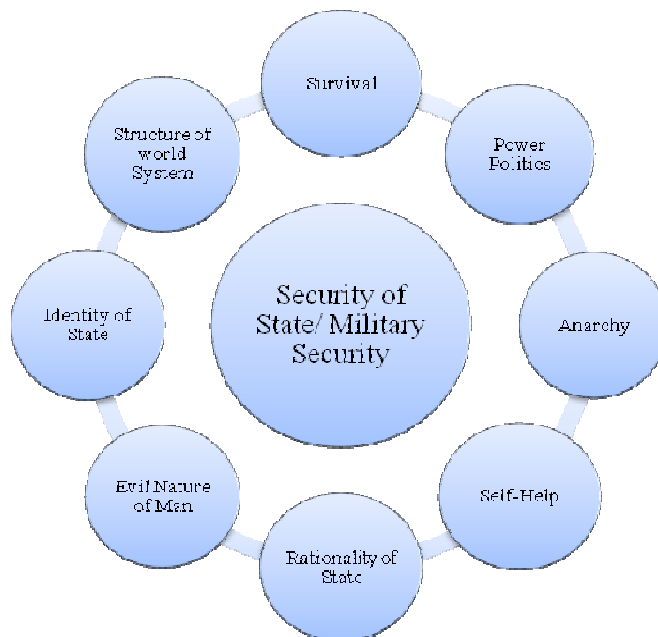
In addition to this, defensive realists also show generosity and allow the role of the institutions. It also shows optimism while side-lining the concept of international uncertain environment.

Realists like Robert G. Gilpin⁴⁷ do not deny the significance of economic factors in international relations. However, they differ with many pluralists and globalists as to the relative importance of politico-military considerations compared to economic factors.⁴⁸ Gilpin's Theory of Cyclical Change has

gained tremendous fame. It has introduced an innovation in the realist paradigm which failed to produce a sound answer to the decline of power. To Gilpin, a major power has three stages in life, the emergence/birth, expansions or attainment of peak and the demise.⁴⁹ He also traces the reasons of decline of major powers or Hegmons. A major power faces decline in that case when the increasingly trivial empire comes to surface. Secondly when there is high ratio of consumption than investment. Lastly, with the penetration of modern technology in the international society, the major power faces decline. All these factors pose challenges to the hegemon. This Gilpin explains as such, “disequilibrium replaces equilibrium, and the world moves toward a new round of hegemonic conflict.”⁵⁰

The realist security paradigm centres on power politics and state. However, it is argued that a change international politics which the realist thinkers negate is doable.⁵¹ Robert Gilpin is of the view that:

*The significance of the state cannot be denied in the determination of diplomatic ties among like states and also in the determination of nature global politics. However, it does not employ that state is sole actor and static in nature and will never prone to change. It is one of the political institutions.*⁵²



Conclusion

Realist ignores the importance of non-state actors. Realism revolves around state only and ignores the rest of actors particularly the non-state actors in modern international political dynamics. Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kapuri say:

*The concept of state is overemphasised in realist paradigm. The significance of the state in world politics cannot be sidelined. The realist thinkers paid no heed to other important actors and out rightly neglected those actors. They kept out the non-state actors such as transnational organizations, financial institutions, terrorist organizations, and global institutions from the realist world view.*⁵³

In addition to this, in realist paradigm the socio-economic factors are either banned or set aside. Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kapuri say:

*Realist security paradigm is mainly concerned with the national security. It ignores the economic disparity between haves and have not and the issue of world pollution. The advocates of realism either assign secondary position to such issues or banish them in to from their manifesto.*⁵⁴

The overemphasis on state security, war and conflicts, use of force as a solution towards peace forced the international relations thinkers to deplore realist security paradigm as imperfect. In this connection, Robert O. Keohane argues:

*Realist school fails to produce a satisfactory and all-accepted theory of global politics. Realism does not speak too much on change and does not provide satisfactory answers to it, particularly where the instruments of that change inherent in the Global Political Economy or in the internal composition of the state.*⁵⁵

To cut the matter short, it may be said that realist security paradigm defines national interests in terms of enhancing a state's security, and its military power. So for a realist, might makes right.⁵⁶ Realists are overemphasising on anarchy which breeds 'the struggle for power' for survival, security, self-help, self-respect/honour, identity and prestige of a state in the global comity. Its significance in the traditional security paradigm cannot be easily ignored.

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