

## Human Nature, Anarchy, and Hierarchy as Determining Factors of Realism

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**Abstract** *Realism is an important theory in International Relations that shapes the politics of the world. The main purpose of realism is to maximize gains and minimize losses. It is a common phenomenon that insecurity the balance of power never remains constant since 'self-help' leads to a condition known as the security dilemma. Realists look at the states from two angles; states either a unitary actor or a hard shell of the black box. Most of the realists view human nature as a cause of war and conflict. They also see the state as negative with self-seeking interests and aggressiveness. Security is the key factor in international politics and is always based upon the power struggle among the nations. Anarchy and hierarchy are the two cardinal principles of realism. The former refers to the structure with no superior authority to dictate the inter-state relations while the latter describes the relations in terms of super-ordination and subordination. The prisoner's dilemma provides a different choice for the solution of maximizing gains and minimizing losses.*

### Key Words:

Human Nature,  
Anarchy,  
Hierarchy,  
Realism,  
Prisoner's  
Dilemma

### Introduction

Theories play an important role in the politics of International Relations. Three broad spectrums of theories comprising traditionalism, globalism, and Marxism have great relevance in shaping world politics. Simply they can be called Realism, Liberalism, and Marxism in the field of International Relations. They provide explanations to different fields of International Relations through theoretical frameworks. The basic logic of realism can be explained through the conceptual

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frameworks of realistic and conservative approaches. Liberalism can be studied and understood under the common nomenclature of globalist and pluralist approaches. The theory of Marxism can be explained through the approaches of neo-Marxism, globalism, and radicalism while grouping them with the concepts Third World theories, Neo-Marxist theories, theories related to structuralism and dependency theories (ARI, 2018).

Realism sees human nature as sinful, egoist, interest-oriented, aggressive, and power-hungry. The opinions of Carr and Hans Morgenthau under classical realism explain international politics through human nature. Machiavelli also explains human nature in the same way by asserting that “it must be taken for granted that all men are wicked and that they will always give vent to their malignity that is there in their minds when the opportunity offers”. Humans have a negative and evil character that compels them towards passion and vanity; (Shimko, 1992) (Buzan, Jones, & Little, 1993). Both Hans Morgenthau and Niebuhr explain international relations in terms of human nature. They opine that states, like human nature, have an egoistic nature always in search of vested interests and aggressiveness. States are always in a look for seeking persistence by increasing their power and capabilities to get control over other states. In such a case, war and conflict are the only alternatives for expansions and extending territorial gains (Buzan, 2004). So, human nature is an important factor in the shaping of international politics. To most of the realists, human nature causes war and conflict since strong coherence exists between the state and human nature for both are self-centered and egoistic

States are the major actors in shaping the politics of the international world. Their interest and rivalry with other states make them more powerful that results in determining world politics. It is important to mention here that Multi-National Companies (MNCs), regional and international organizations are not supposed to be the state actors though they may be used as a means for creating a monopoly over the economic markets of the world. The realists perceive the states as rational actors; that behave according to certain rules and national interests for realizing their objectives and sustainability through national capacity (Grieco, 2015). For all the realist states, the basic thing is the issue of security that compels them to maximize their national interest at the cost of others. Thus, maximizing one’s gain always results in the loss of the other counterpart. For the existence of the state, security is the topmost priority while other issues may be concerned with commerce, finance, money, and health. For a realist doctrine, power is always mean to get the end of security. Therefore, the power struggle among nations is the key factor in determining their survival. In security measures, the balance of power does not remain constant; it is either tilted towards one side or the other. There is always gain for one party while a loss for the other.

An important aspect of the realistic doctrine is that the entire structure of world politics is based upon the anarchy of the international structure. In Politics, it does

not refer to a chaotic condition or the non-existence of order but connotes the absence of rules and lack of government. Simply, it refers to the non-existence of hierarchical political order based upon formal subordination and power (Donnelly, 2000). In the international system, there is the absence of a centralized authority that can help in governing inter-state relations. In such a system, security becomes the main concern of the states for the sake of their survival. States have to tackle their security problems under the umbrella of ‘self-help’. Since most of the states act in the same way of dealing with their security, hence no state can have the capability to of attaining absolute security and rather nourish the security for all states which creates the condition of the security dilemma, also called security paradox. In such a situation, the increase in the security measures of one state is looked upon by another as jeopardy to its security which may result in strengthening and expanding their security potentialities for safeguarding the national interest (Kegley, 1993, pp.113-146).

As far as anarchy is concerned, it refers to the absence of a superior authority capable of organizing the relations among the sovereign states, relying upon themselves for their goals (Schmidt, 2016). In the absence of a superior authority, security is the only concern of the sovereign states. The International Organizations cannot order relations among the sovereign states and can help only to the extent of doing what the member states want to do and have very little influence on the behavior of the state (John, 1994). The non-state actors such as the terrorist groups play a secondary role in the realist perspective. Such a system is termed by the realists as a system comprising sovereign states with a network of their complex interactions. In anarchy, the main concern of the states is their security because international organizations can’t restrain them from any act of aggression. The states are responsible for their acts of commission and omission on the stage of the world.

Secondly, the realists look at the state from two different perspectives. Looking through the pragmatic view, the state is seen as a unitary actor by the realists. But for theory building and analysis, the state is seen as a metaphorical hard shell or opaque, black box (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012). In this perspective, whenever an international issue overpowers, the whole state comes out with one voice and faces the challenges of the international arena as an integrated unit (Viotti & Kauppi, 2019). The government tries to tackle the differences arising out of domestic politics and the state as a unitary actor, has one policy for every issue it has to deal with. As unitary actors, the states are seen as monolithic for maximizing their power and relative gains. So, in case of any issue of great importance such as security or issue of national interest the whole nation acts as unifying force for creating harmony and coherence among all the units of the state.

Thirdly, the realists believe that ‘incarnated in the leader’ states are seen as rational purposive actors trying to maximize their interests in the form of power. This is synonymous with the doctrine of Hans Morgenthau, who states that

international politics is struggling for power (Morgenthau, 1997). Power, according to Morgenthau, is the ultimate end in international politics. This view of power politics is also shared by Edward Carr, who says that politics is in reality power politics (Carr, 1981). Thus states have to choose from a set of alternatives to serve stated objectives in an optimum way. Thus, rationality coupled with state-centrism plays a critical role in the acceptance of the state as a unitary actor to apply to rational choice models such as the balance of power, deterrence, and the use of force.

Fourthly, the realists emphasize the hierarchy of issues in which security-related measures are on the top of priority. “Military and related political issues dominate world politics” (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012). In this perspective, military, strategic issues concerning the security of the state are often termed as “high politics” whereas socio-economic issues fall within the purview of “low politics”. This hierarchy mentions the realist vision of political issues in terms of their significance and primacy over one another. Hierarchy clarifies the distinction between high politics and low politics. The main purpose of realism is to emphasize the high politics as it covers the military and security related issues. Realism is of many forms some of the most important is the classical and structural realism. Here is a brief sketch of these forms and the prisoner’s dilemma.

### **Classical Realism**

Hobbes draws a dismal picture of human beings in his Leviathan. He opines that the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. According to him, all men are equal by nature and he draws the picture of men in a “realist fashion: even the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others” (Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, 2000). Hobbes makes three simple assumptions about human nature:

- i) Equality of men
- ii) Their interaction in anarchy
- iii) They are driven by competition, diffidence, and glory.

The conjunction of these leads to a war of all against all, creating a sort of anarchy. Hobbes describes three main causes of warlike men, which are competition, diffidence, and glory. It is the competition that makes men invade for gain. Equality is meant to have as much as anyone else has. From equality emerges diffidence, fear and from diffidence emerges war. The best defense is a good offense; “by force or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can”. It is for the sake of safety, reputation, or gain that men will endeavor to destroy or subdue one another (Myers, & Donley, 2008). The notions to do good or bad, to be right or wrong, to be just or unjust are not to be found in his dictionary. Men, by nature, love glory and it is that spirit that drives them for doing certain actions. Hobbes’ classical realism centers around three cardinal principles entailing upon the

equality of men, to act in anarchy and that competition, diffidence, and glory are the driving forces behind human beings.

These principles highlight the importance of human nature, the ultimate end of which is the gain of power at any rate. The ultimate end for which the whole machinery of the state works is power while the means of getting that objective is human nature. Again, power and interest vary from state to state and from individual to individual as a ruler of the states. Both are relative to the leaders depending upon the idiosyncratic nature of the individuals. It is also important that in international relations there are neither permanent foes nor friends, what is more, important is the national interest. It is the national interest that makes states enter into alliances and treaties while the role of morality is irrelevant. So, power is defined in terms of relative gains which may result in a loss for the other. Another important aspect of realism is the national interest that again uses human nature as a means to get that end.

### **Structural Realism**

Another important aspect of realism is structural realism or neo-realism, the chief exponent of which is Kenneth Waltz who outlined it in 1979 in his book “The Theory of International Politics”. According to Waltz, “international structure emerges from the interaction of states and then constrains them from taking certain actions while propelling them towards others” (Waltz, 1991). Political structures are determined by their ordering principle, differentiation of functions, and distribution of capabilities. Hierarchy and anarchy are the two major political ordering principles. In international relations, units either stand in a relationship of authority and subordination (hierarchy) or they do not (anarchy). A hierarchy describes relations of super- and subordination among a system’s parts, and which implies their differentiation. For example, the separation of three organs of the state, legislative, executive, and judiciary can better be used to explain this relationship. On the other hand, anarchic orders have little functional differentiation. In this parlance, differences between the states are of capability and not of function. So, structural realism is the joint name for the interaction of states that determines standards of behavior for the world; using the tactics of restraining some from taking certain actions while compelling others for doing some actions.

Waltz opines that in the international structure order cannot be implemented from the above by the superior authority but this order emerges as a result of the interaction of states represented by the political leaders (Donnelly, 2000). This structure is composed of the two elements of anarchy and non-anarchy. The differentiation of functions is another criterion for defining political structures. Relations among the various units of the system are also defined by the hierarchy that describes them in the form of superordination and subordination. It is on this basis that the theory of separation of power works; while bringing about the

separation among the legislation, execution, and judicial departments. The anarchic order defines each state as a detached, sovereign, and officially identical component counting on its resources for the realization of its interests. In such anarchy, each state is concerned with maintaining its security since no one would be there to do so for it. All the important functions have to be performed by the state itself. The principal differentiation of functions between states is of capabilities and not functions.

The political structure also enjoins upon the allocation of various potentialities among the units in its way. In the case of the anarchic structure and where the principle of differentiation of functions among the various states is lacking, then the allocation of potentialities among the actors can help in distinguishing the international political structure. Since the structure emerges from the interaction of great powers so they can make or unmake the international structure. For the survival of the international structure, the only working theory, according to Waltz, is the balance of power theory that helps in determining relations among the formally equal states. Sometimes, the theory of deterrence can also determine the relations among the strong and weak states. It is not necessary that all the relations may be determined by the balance of power theory. The theory of deterrence runs parallel to it to restrain the stronger states from taking action against the weaker states. Pak- India relations can better be explained in the parlance of both balance of power theory as well as the deterrence theory. For example, five nuclear detonations by India in May 1998 followed by Pakistan with six nuclear detonations in the same month were more of a deterrence theory than the balance of power theory.

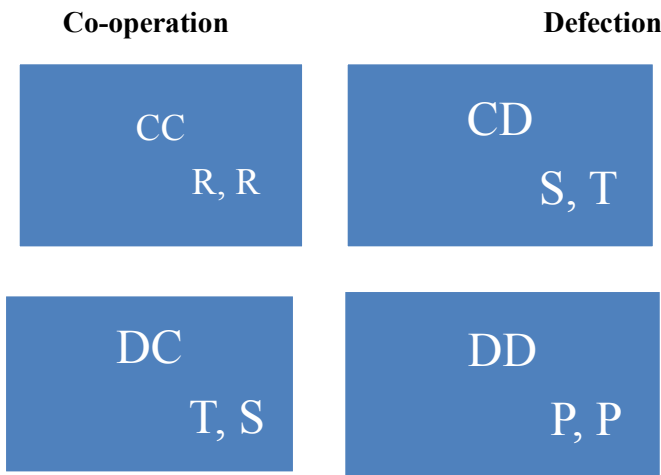
This theory is based upon two major assumptions; the anarchy and the hierarchy that is very useful in determining the international structure. The balance of power theory is workable in a situation in which two states mostly belligerent co-exist in the absence of a superpower that may help the weaker state or denying to either of them the instrumentality that may be used for deterring them from the war. In the balance of power theory, the determining power in the anarchy is 'balance' rather than 'bandwagon' (Schweller, 1997). While in the anarchy, the political leaders balance rather than a bandwagon, so in the hierarchy, the political leaders go to the side of the winners since losing will not put their security in jeopardy (Schweller, 1994). A state should mostly concentrate upon its relative power and the other states particularly the great powers may pose a threat to its security. Here the only alternative with the weak states in alignment with the great powers that will ensure their survival and security (Donnelly, 2005).

Realism, as a theory, is the art of operating the world as per its dictums. It can be utilized for peace and war (Donnelly, 2005). For example, millions of people would not have been lost if the US had taken recourse to the policy of bipolarity based on realism during its rivalry with the Soviet Union during the Cold War and would not have pursued a policy of ideology. Waltz also recognizes the internal

differences among states. According to him, states are at liberty to do what they want to do. “They are free to do any fool thing but they are likely to be rewarded for behavior which is responsive to structural pressures and punished for behavior that is not” (Waltz, 1997). John Mearsheimer puts in these terms that ‘ in the concluding breakdown, the system forces states to behave in accordance with the dictates of realism or risk destruction’ (Mearsheimer, 1995).

### **The Prisoner’s Dilemma**

This framework is based on the doctrine of stimulus and response. In international relations, the behavior of the actor is determined by the anticipatory action of another state or actor. This explains the security dilemma in a very simple form and lucid way. Two rational actors with two available strategies explain this game (Synder, 1971). One of which is “cooperation” and the other one is “defection”. In this game of two-by-two, four possible outcomes emerge, which are given in the following diagram:



**R= ‘reward’ (CC)**  
**T= “temptation” (DC)**  
**S= “sucker” (CD)**  
**P= “penalty” (DD)**  
**T>R>P>S**

Two thieves, who are imprisoned by the police in two different cells, can explain the Prisoner’s Dilemma in a very simple form. They are interrogated by the police in such a way that the other does not know about the imprisonment of the other. Each thief is provided with favor and is asked to make a confessionary statement against his other co-accused that will lead to his acquittal Pacheco et al,

2010). But without a confession, the authorities can obtain a conviction only on a lesser charge. The preferential order in the game of prisoner's dilemma is  $T > R > P > S$ : this sequence shows that temptation (confession) is preferred to reward (mutual silence), which is preferred to a penalty (mutual confessing), which is preferred to the sucker's payoff. Getting the maximum benefit out of it, the following result can be obtained;

- i) Tempting has value than the sucker that has lesser value
- ii) In the case of cooperation, either of them gets the second-best result.
- iii) Defection by both prisoners is the best solution to the problem. Though it is a sensible outcome but leaves players in a sub-optimal position.

In the case of consensus-based cooperation by both, while establishing some method of enforcing it, it could lead to the evasion of the dilemma or lessening its severity. To increase the likelihood to cooperate results in the risk of being suckered. On the other hand, an increase in the payoff of cooperation (R) or a decrease in the cost of mutual defection (P) would prognosticate the incentives for cooperation even in the absence of enforcement. This can be written in the short form as  $T > R > P > S$ , which shows realism in the doctrine of egoism and anomalism. So, international anarchy helps in precluding enforceable agreements to cooperate. In this paradigm, international relations are marked by insecurity, competition, and conflict even in the wake of strong incentives to cooperate. It is an admitted fact that international anarchy leads to a "security dilemma" (Herz, 1951). According to Robert Jervis, the dilemma arises because "many of how a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others" (Herz., 1976).

## **Conclusion**

Human nature is an important factor in shaping world politics. It is synonymous with the state that too is self-centered and aggressive in getting their objectives achieved through any means. Rivalry among the states and their active participation in the affairs of the world can make them key actors in the field of international relations. It is also pertinent to mention that the MNCs, Regional and International Organizations do not play any significant role in the security paradigm of the world though they may be used as means of capturing the market mechanism of a particular region or part. The basic thing is the security that tries to compel nations for maximizing relative gains at the cost of others, who are often the losers. This leads to a condition in security known as the security dilemma or security paradox. This paradox is based upon the doctrine of the power struggle among the nations where the states are seen as actors. The state is seen through two different views; one is the theory of pragmatism which entails upon the state as a unitary actor while looking through the theoretical view, the state is seen as a black box. International Relations describe units in two major forms, when they stand in a relationship of authority and subordination, which can better be



explained in the separation of powers through the separation of legislative, executive and judiciary, it is termed as a hierarchy but when they don't stand in such relationship, then it signifies anarchy. The notion of structural realism emerges as a result of the interaction of states by imposing standards of behavior upon them in their decision making powers. In the anarchy, state units determine their security since there is no differentiation of states based on classification. It is also important that where the states are not differentiated based on functions, their fates are determined by the international political structure. The best theory which helps in providing a viable theory of international politics is the balance of power theory which conceives of states as the concentration of powers in the competing environment. An important characteristic of the hierarchical political order is the tendency of jumping on the bandwagon since losing never puts their security in jeopardy in any case. Realism also explains state in terms of high politics and low politics; the former refers to matters of security and military while the latter refers to matters of finance, trade, etc. Kenneth Waltz is of the view that international relations is a domain of anarchic and non-anarchic political structure in which order is not exercised from above but gets established as a result of the interactions of states. The prisoner's dilemma provides foundations for the behavior of individuals based on stimulus and response. This explains realism whereby two thieves are apprehended by the police and kept in separate cells with each ignorant about the other being locked and treated in the same way. The solution is presented in a very precise manner of  $T > R > P > S$ ; signify that temptation (confession) is preferred to reward (mutual silence), showing its preference over a penalty (mutual confessing), while showing its preference over sucker's payoff.

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