

Realism in International Relations

Prompt: What is realism in international relations ?

GPT-4 (4 April 2024): Realism in international relations is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the competitive and conflictual side of international politics. It's rooted in the assumption that states are the primary actors in the international system and they act primarily out of self-interest, driven by the desire for power and security. Here are some key principles and ideas associated with realism:

1. **Anarchy and Sovereignty:** The international system is anarchic, meaning there's no overarching authority above states. This anarchy compels states to prioritize their own survival and sovereignty.
2. **State Behavior:** States are rational actors that make strategic choices based on the logic of self-help and survival in the international system. Their primary goal is to ensure their security, which often leads to a focus on military power and alliances.
3. **Power and Balance of Power:** Realism places a significant emphasis on power, both in terms of military might and economic capabilities. A key concept within realism is the balance of power, where states adjust their alliances and build their capacities to prevent any single state from becoming too powerful.
4. **Security Dilemma:** The actions taken by a state to increase its security can make other states feel less secure. This can lead to arms races and conflicts, even if no state originally desired confrontation.
5. **Pessimism about International Cooperation:** Realists are generally skeptical about the prospects for long-term international cooperation, especially on issues where states' interests fundamentally conflict. They argue that international institutions and norms have limited ability to change state behavior because these institutions and norms are ultimately subject to the interests and power of the states that created them.

Realism has various branches, including classical realism, which focuses on human nature and the inherent lust for power; structural (or neorealism), which emphasizes the distribution of power in the international system; and neoclassical realism, which seeks to incorporate both the international structure and domestic factors in explaining state behavior.

Realism has been a dominant theory in international relations, especially during the Cold War, as it provided a framework for understanding the bipolar power struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, it is also subject to criticism for its perceived cynicism, its neglect of non-state actors, and its limited attention to the role of international institutions and cooperation.

See also Prof. John Mearsheimer from the University of Chicago providing a short presentation of [realism and liberalism](#) in a discussion with John Anderson (former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia).