

MAIN REALIST THEORISTS AND THEIR ROLE BACKGROUND OF SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Realism is considered the main theory able to regenerate the new international relations paradigm. It especially developed in the Anglo-American world and represented the intellectual and academic effort to justify U.S. foreign policy in the new international conditions, marked by the setting of the Cold War. The principal theoreticians of realism are: E.H. Carr, R. Neibuhr, I. Herz, H.I. Morgenthau, G. Schwarzenberger, M. Wight, N. Spykman, G. Kennan, R. Aron, H. Bull, H. Kissinger, R.E. Osgood, R. Rosecrance, K.W. Thompson, K.N. Waltz, John J. Mearsheimer etc.

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Realism is considered the main theory able to regenerate the new international relations paradigm. Emerging as a reaction to idealism, specific to the inter-war period, it developed after the Second World War and peaked in the early years of the postwar period. It especially developed in the Anglo-American world and represented the intellectual and academic effort to justify U.S. foreign policy in the new international conditions, marked by the setting of the *Cold War*. The entire evolution of political realism can be considered a continuous development around the concepts and assumptions that defined this theory. This evolution could be understood: "*as a repeated and always failing attempt to turn the principles of European diplomatic practice in the nineteenth century into broader laws of an American social science*"¹. Among the first theoreticians who addressed realism in their writings, one could mention: E.H. Carr, R. Neibuhr, I. Herz, H.I. Morgenthau, G. Schwarzenberger,

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¹ Stefano Guzzini, *Realism and International Relations*, European Institute's Publishing House, Iași, 2000, p. 5.

M. Wight, N. Spykman, G. Kennan, and later R. Aron, H. Bull, H. Kissinger, R.E. Osgood, R. Rosecrance, K.W. Thompson, K.N. Waltz, John J. Mearsheimer etc.

An important feature of political realism is the definition of international politics as a "*struggle for power*". The significance of power both as a means and an end in itself can be: "the ability to influence or change the behavior of others in the desired direction or, conversely, the ability to resist such influences by one's own behavior. In this respect, the state's ability to act and react is a function of the power they possess"². The fact that states do not actually respond to any supreme authority makes each state concerned about its own security, in order to ensure their survival. Therefore, national interest is perceived in terms of power, other factors such as ideological values or moral principles being irrelevant. The international system's anarchic nature requires states to achieve a military power that would be able to reach a credible stage in order to discourage any attempt to attack, which would be achievable through a balance of power, stability and order being the product of the alliances systems' proper functioning. Because realists admit the existence of conflict in international relations, cooperation is possible only if performed in national interest. In the international system, its structure swings between power capabilities and the notion of equality, which is seen in a formal sense, meaning that it involves equality between states.

Criticism of realism, starting even with its emergence, focuses on the lack of a clear research methodology, imprecision in defining key terms, inability to explain certain evolutions in international relations, such as the phenomenon of cooperation and integration of European countries etc. and were supported in the early '60s by the *behavioral* trend, which integrated the results of social psychology and of the investigative techniques using computers. The response to this disapproval, known as *the Great Debate* between supporters of the new approaches, called scientific approaches, and those of the classical approach, called traditional approaches, came from Hedley Bull, who noted in 1966 that "the international life is too complex to fit into some predetermined patterns, and that no matter how sophisticated the investigative techniques would be, they could never replace healthy common sense, based on intuition, careful observation and political experience, as the ultimate tool for deepening knowledge in the international life"³.

E.H. Carr was the one who attempted to underlie the realist theory, strongly criticizing idealism in his reference work *The Twenty Years Crisis*,

² Graham Evans, Jeffrey Newnham, *Dictionary of International Relations*, Dolti Universal Publishing House, [f.l.], 2001, pp. 476-477.

³ Hedley Bull, *The Case for a Classical Approach*, în Keans Knorr and James Rosenau Editors, Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 26-27.

revealing three major drawbacks: *the motivation is seen as a priority in comparison to interests, ethics in comparison to politics and theory in comparison to practice*⁴. The following are some of the ideas that Carr promoted: politics can not be analyzed on the basis of an earlier program, but only on the basis of its current results, therefore realism is researching consequences and then building the theory's arguments; the interests harmony is nothing but a representation of power configuration that ultimately makes the interests of the dominant group to be extrapolated to the entire community⁵; all laws, principles and ideologies are determined by social conditions, and "all internationalist ideologies are mere rationalizations operated by dominated powers, in order to protect their privileged position"⁶, realism being based on the will to consider man and social relations, especially political relations, as they actually are, and not as they want to become for the sake of an ideal⁷. Thus, Carr's theoretical approach of realism is very brief, its purpose is to achieve a synthesis of idealism and realism, the first being labeled as impractical, because of its prevailing utopian character, and the second, because it lacks perspective, reduces policy to a mechanical adaptation to the international relations needs.

Hans Morgenthau entered the international relations theory through his work *Politics Among Nations*, in a very important moment for the U.S. political evolution⁸. Victorious after the Second World War, the U.S. needed a theoretical justification in its foreign policy, especially since its superpower status brought it a series of global responsibilities. The main message of H. Morgenthau's book is the concept of power politics, which is analyzed starting from the three basic human impulses: *the impulse to live, reproduce and dominate*. Thanks to the latter, mankind has been engaged in a constant struggle for power, and this is the essence of politics and war⁹; in this context, the desire for power being rooted in human nature itself, in the natural instinct to dominate. The concept of power has been undermined by assumptions such as: power is not absolute, it is always in conjunction with other powers; it is not permanent either, because power bases are constantly changing and it is not the result of a single factor, such as military force¹⁰. In his view, in an

⁴ Stefano Guzzini, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁵ Edward Hellet Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Macmillan, London, 1946, pp. 44-46.

⁶ Stefano Guzzini, *op. cit.*, p. 57, apud E.H. Carr, *op. cit.*

⁷ Ion Deaconescu, *Teoria relațiilor internaționale*, Europe Publishing House, Sitech Publishing House, Craiova, 2005, p. 15.

⁸ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among nations. Power struggle and the struggle for peace*, Polirom Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, p. 276.

⁹ Stefano Guzzini, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

anarchic system, the national state manages the struggle for power, but, since it can not be fully eradicated, it is directed outwards: "Unable to fully satisfy the desire for power within national borders, people transfer their unfulfilled aspirations on the international stage"¹¹. In addition, any organized international system has to be based on normative mechanisms, three different mechanisms being identified in this respect: *ethics*, *world public opinion* and *international law*. If they fail, national forces will lose their temper and will cause conflicts. States' power aspiration configures the balance of power, and states, as international political actors, will set their interest, which will be defined in terms of power: given the fact that in any individual there is an instinct for power and conquest, so the state tends to develop and show its power at international level, in relation with other nations. In this context, the balance of power is not matter of political choice, but rather something natural, capturing several levels of the balance of power: *buffer states*, *protecting states* and *interest states*, namely those states for which the great powers compete and that they want within their influence area. The balance of power may be maintained in peace, or imbalanced at war, being influenced by politics.

Kissinger's rise in the American politics in the twentieth century, more precisely, in the early '70s, came amid the military engagement in Vietnam; the U.S. declined in credibility and legitimacy, allowing the USSR, which launched an ambitious program of weapons and of expanding its influence in the world, to achieve strategic parity. The main proposed tool for foreign policy was diplomacy¹², obviously, adapted to the European Concert system, which was specific to the nineteenth century, and there was an interest in relaxation, as a means of creating a legitimate international order. The great powers he had in mind when referring to the new international order were China and the USSR. If, concerning China, he estimated that it was within the classical tradition of the European art of government, the USSR contained many elements of a "ruthless opportunism", which lead to U.S. adopting a policy of containment when necessary and cooperation when possible. Through a detente policy and various concessions, he hoped to generate some changes in the USSR and to prepare the end of Cold War. He also proposed the concept of *connection*, as an expansion dimension, realized also through a containment policy through negotiated connections, i.e. interfering political sequences in order to build an active and successful diplomacy; the essence of the connection policy consisting of two elements: the USSR integration in the European economic structures, and increasing economic benefits in order to determine the USSR to politically cooperate. Therefore, the concert

¹¹ Hans Morgenthau, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹² Henry Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy*, Norton, New York, 1969, p. 54.

diplomacy could not succeed as long as the USSR was willing to accept certain changes in its foreign policy, but not in the domestic one. Another interesting conclusion concerns the central balance of superpowers, which proved questionable in dominating the international relations, in the same way as allies' dependence of a superpower does not automatically imply the latter's authority. Foreign relations, at their level, could not be addressed without taking into account the domestic policy, even though foreign policy would prefer it the other way round.

Methodological shortcomings of traditional realism have led some scholars to reassess the role of power in achieving cooperation under anarchy. The point at which neorealism differs from realism is the methodology and conception on the self¹³. This theoretical approach was defined *neorealism* or *structural realism*. The most important representatives of this theory believe that all social systems have, among other things, a political subsystem in which the management issue plays a central role, introducing the concept of *great hegemonic power*. This hegemonic state requires order in international relations without conquering, exerting a benign management of the system¹⁴. K.N. Waltz is considered to be the main representative of this theory, in his *Theory of International Politics* being concerned by power distribution, and defining structure through three main characteristics: a) an international system is hierarchical; b) the international system is anarchic, i.e. each state must take care of its all essential functions, and c) a structure is defined by the distribution of capabilities between its units,¹⁵ and war found its origins *in the human nature* or *in the state's type of regime*, or *the international system* characteristics. K. Waltz also proposed a definition of the international political system centered on state "international structures are defined through fundamental political units of an era, meaning state-cities, empires or nations." Thus, in his opinion, at present there is no other essential international political unity besides the state. Conversely, the structure of the international political system is defined by what states do (this is the reason why war and diplomacy are the international politics' main manifestations)¹⁶. Waltz believes that states' fundamental goal is not maximizing power, but achieving or maximizing security. However, he states that: "States, or those acting on their behalf, are trying, in more or less appropriate ways, to use the available means in order to achieve the proposed goals. These methods fall

¹³ Mihail E Ionescu, *După hegemonie. Patru scene de securitate pentru Europa de Est în anii '90*, Scripta Publishing House, Bucharest, 1993, p. 242.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 241.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 261-262.

into two categories: internal efforts (to increase economic capacity and the military force, to develop appropriate strategies) and external efforts (building or expanding their own alliances, or weakening and limiting hostile alliances)"¹⁷. This means that increasing power is really only a means – an inevitable one – to other ends. His theory on the balance of power is derived from the assumed motivations (security) and actions (improving position in terms of power)¹⁸. In this regard, states are tempted to balance power, not to augment it, and given the anarchy of the international field, at a certain time, states will react so as to balance the distribution of power, given the constraints they are subject to.

As states' behavior registered surprising changes and fluctuations, as a consequence of their own interests, and of the accumulation of forces that are difficult to handle, states must consider many aspects and rules, as Robert Gilpin, another neorealist representative, warns: "1) An international system is stable (i.e. in a steady state) if no state considers that it is profitable to try changing the system; 2) A state will try to change the international system if it expects the benefits to exceed the costs of such attempts; 3) a state will seek to change the international system through territorial, political or economic expansion, when the marginal costs for that change are equal to/or greater than the marginal benefits; 4) Once the balance of costs and benefits in the pursued change is achieved, the tendency is that these economic costs, needed for the preservation of the status quo, should grow faster than the economic capacity necessary to maintain the status quo; 5) If the imbalance in the international system is not solved, the system will be changed, and a new balance will be established, reflecting the power redistribution"¹⁹. In addition, he believes that the regulatory element of the world system imbalance is the hegemonic war. This means decides which state will be dominant and lead the system. "Peace arrangements that follow such a hegemonic struggle reorder political, territorial, and other types of system bases. The hegemonic war's role is to correct this imbalance in the system. The end of the hegemonic war is, in fact, the beginning of a new cycle of growth, expansion, and decline for the new hegemonic power(s). The law of uneven development leads to a continuous distribution of power and, consequently, to hegemonic cycles. Along with Gilpin's view, there can be mentioned George Modelski's contribution. The ideas he promotes claim that: the anarchy in the world system of states determines periods of strict hierarchy of actors and

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 256, apud Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1979, p. 118.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 257.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 17, apud Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 10-11.

"hegemonic leadership", or "world leadership", hegemonic states are recruited from maritime powers, and their competitors are usually terrestrial countries; hegemonic powers impose order in the system, without using conquests. When hegemonic wars – global or world wars – burst, they are designed to provide the system's leadership²⁰.

However, an important contribution to neorealism was brought by John J. Mearsheimer, who, in his work *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, Norton, 2001), does not stop at system level, but aims to provide a theory of foreign policy. According to him, the international politics structure is the key to understanding facts and presents five hypotheses that characterize the essential features of international politics: a) the international system is anarchic, meaning that there is no governing body above governments to promulgate laws and punish criminals - sovereignty is inherent for states; b) states always have a certain military capability that gives them the means to hurt and destroy each other; c) states can never be sure about the intentions of other states, if others will attack them, or not, by military means; d) surviving is the main goal of all states in the international system, so they try to maintain the territorial integrity and internal autonomy; e) states are rational actors that think strategically concerning their external situation, and choose the strategy that can maximize their initial survival goal²¹. If Waltz's realism is a "defensive" one, meaning that states seek the balance of power in an anarchic environment, Mearsheimer promotes an "offensive" realism, meaning that the great powers seek to maximize their power bringing disadvantages to their rivals, with the goal to obtain hegemony. Thus, a hegemon is seen as a state that is so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system, and hegemony is seen as the domination of the system, which is usually interpreted as the whole world, and in this sense, war is the main means of gaining power²². Power is defined in terms of latent capacity (population, economic strength) and manifests (military power). Only the great powers that have great military capabilities are able to lead wars and to dispute to the role of hegemon²³.

In comparison to Waltz's states, Mearsheimer's are more open to risk and to taking into account other objectives than security. If, in Waltz's case, powers are oriented to maintaining the status quo, in Mearsheimer's, they are revisionist. Starting from capabilities distribution, Mearsheimer distinguishes

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 19-20.

²¹ John J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of power politics. Offensive Realism and the struggle for power*, Antet Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 27.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 20.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

the following types of international structure: *balanced bipolarism*, *balanced multipolarism*, and *imbalanced multipolarism*, and he notes that, in these structures, multipolar systems are more unstable and more prone to war than bipolar ones because of the fact that the number of significant actors increases war opportunities, asymmetries are more common and the risk of calculation errors concerning relative power, and states' decision to pursue their interests increase²⁴. In this context, one may emphasize the fact that both defensive realism theory (Waltz), and offensive realism (Mearsheimer), make important clarifications on the concepts (state, power, hegemony etc.) and ideas supported by the International Relations realist theory. Concluding, there may be said that realism, beyond all limitations and criticisms that it faces, and regardless of the forms it took (defensive, offensive), remains the main International Relations theory that objectively presents states' behavior in the international system.

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²⁴ Andrei Miroiu, Radu Sebastian Ungureanu (coord), *Manual de relații internaționale*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2006, p. 152.