Realism and Foreign Policy Analysis

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I. Introduction

Power politics, realists agree, is played by all, be it for reasons of human nature and/or international anarchy. But can one deduce from this general quest for power a theory on state motivations? Recent realist theories seem to agree with this idea in general, but disagree, indeed have opposite claims, about its content. Kenneth Waltz (1979) argues that states are defensive and thus "balance," while John Mearsheimer (1990) contends that states are offensive and therefore "expand." Classical realists, as usual, allow for more common sense and hence variety. Hans Morgenthau (1948) thus included both status quo and imperialist powers in his theory. But the implication of this indeterminacy remains: if realists cannot settle the question which state motivation can be derived from human nature and/or international anarchy, then they need to examine more carefully the study of foreign policy.

Curiously enough, classical realists have not happily grappled with the field of foreign policy analysis (FPA) that emerged in the 1960s. As our first section shows, realists challenged FPA's increasing distance to the diplomat's world of experience and the restricted focus on decision-making, which accompanied the attempt to turn IR into a behavioralist science. But the underlying indeterminacy meant that realists could not leave the challenge of FPA unanswered. Consequently, realists have further expanded the range of state motivations said to derive from human nature/international anarchy, namely power, glory, and ideas, as shown in section III. With regard to policy processes, realists contend that the process must shape policy to take advantage of international power opportunities, which remains the analytical bottom-line. Yet, they differ widely in their assessment of how this actually happens, as section IV illuminates. The conclusion outlines the major research challenges within the realist framework and also the main realist contributions to the field of foreign policy analysis.

II. Classical Realism *versus* Foreign Policy Analysis?

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) appeared as a field of study in the early 1960s in the US. That sentence should in itself be read as a paradox: what else, if not analyzing foreign policy, had a large bulk of scholars been doing? FPA charged that the traditional research was inadequate. Classical Realists replied that FPA had an altogether different purpose and subject matter.

The onslaught by FPA

Early FPA criticized two central facets of the traditional approach to the study of foreign policy: it argued for more scientific theory, and questioned the analytical priority previously given to the international level. FPA thus further undermined the traditional distinction between International Relations and Political Science, as contested as it always was. Indeed, these two criticisms can be combined against Classical Realists. For Classical Realists had been arguing that the international level was qualitatively different from domestic politics (Bull 1966b), a difference which also accounted for the reason “why there is no international theory?” (Wight 1966, but see also Bull 1966a) in any comparable sense to Political Science. Consequently, FPA itself was initially not boxed under the “hopeless” sub-discipline of International Relations, but under the political science branch of public policy (Carlsnaes 2002).

For analytical purposes, one can distinguish three strands in this systematic FPA. On the behaviorist end of the spectrum, scholars explicitly attempted to derive testable propositions for wider comparative studies of foreign policy *input* and *output* (Rosenau 1980). More classical scholars dealt with the expanding agenda of diplomacy and the increasingly more complicated combination of policy instruments for a coherent comparative foreign policy analysis. They understood foreign policy as *diplomacy* or *statecraft* (George et al. 1971; George and Craig 1983). Finally, in what was to become the defining watershed in FPA, whatever the final verdict on his book[1], Graham T. Allison’s *Essence of Decision* (1971) proposed to study foreign policy as *decision-making process*, developing the earlier path-breaking study by Snyder et al (1962).

Allison’s book provoked a watershed for its systematic treatment of approaches in forms of frameworks of analysis, which would be conceptual

[1] For more recent discussions, see e.g. Welch (1992) and Schneider (1997).

and not empiricist, yet historical-qualitative and not behaviorist. This allowed the carving out of a middle-range field of systematic foreign policy analysis as opposed to both "diplomatic history" and behaviorist "science". One can indeed follow the development of FPA through the three models of his analysis. The critique of the first (rational) model challenged the division between international theory and foreign policy analysis by arguing that purely structural balances of power cannot tell us how decisions, even "rational ones", are made. Moreover, it challenged input-output models more generally: even in cases where the actual behavior conforms to the alleged imperatives of the balance of power, this might have been for reasons very different from the externally assumed "rational action". Foreign policy analysis needs careful "process-tracing" (George 1979). With the stage set, models II and III relied on dynamics of organizational inertia as well as psychological, even cognitive (Steinbruner 1974) variables for understanding the Cuban missile crisis. In its aftermath, FPA focused heavily on bureaucratic politics and belief systems, be they on the individual, group and discursive level.

The purposes and subject matter of Classical Realist Foreign Policy Analysis

In return, one can find two issues on which classical realist scholars beg to differ with mainstream FPA: in the understanding of their purpose and in the very subject matter of "foreign policy".

FPA and classical scholars differ in their main purpose. The classical scholar worked in a different environment where language and experiences were shared between the practitioner and the observer. The mainstream FPA analyst would insist on working on the level of external observation, so as to generate insights into the "irrationalities" of the decision-makers (or their supporting organizations). In contrast, the classical scholar would instead try to (in)form decision-makers first by overseeing their socialization into the life-world of international diplomacy, and, second, by regularly giving reference points for a historical update.

For the purpose of socializing diplomats into the life-world of foreign affairs, classical realists generally base their understanding on the initially aristocratic principle of the "primacy of foreign policy". This maxim has been the cornerstone of diplomacy since the 19th century - exactly because it became increasingly contested. It has two main implications: political practice

in international affairs follows different rules than in domestic politics, and it is to be given priority over domestic concerns. Translating this maxim into a scholarly rule justifies an approach to foreign policy that begins with an analysis of the common practices and institutions of the “international society”.[2] Foreign policy analysis has to connect the observer, increasingly detached and socialized in domestic politics, to this, the international practitioner’s, understanding in order to make the life-world of diplomacy understandable. And it has to update (future) practitioners on the society’s rules in order to allow the practitioners to understand and act within the confines of international society and its institutions.

The second purpose of classical studies of foreign policy, namely to reflect on the coordinates within which the practices of international society develop, has given birth to two paths of inquiry. Along the historical/philosophical path, scholars reflect upon the changing historical environment, which might warrant a reform or at least adaptation of some of the classical maxims. On another more analytical path, scholars updated the understanding of two building blocs of classical theorizing, namely anarchy at the international level and types of motivation at the state level.

The historical/philosophical update arises out of the interest in exploring the conditions under which the 19th century had been able to avoid major wars between the great powers. What were the conditions for a successful development of a Concert and subsequently of Concert Diplomacy? Morgenthau (1948) can be seen as representative for all those who were wary about the effects of democracy on the primacy of foreign policy and on the capacity of diplomats to restore an equivalent of the earlier “Aristocratic International”. Kissinger (1957) looked at the bases of a legitimate order, which must not necessarily be just, but whose underlying principles – the rules of the game, as it were – the major players accept. This is also what Aron (1962) referred to as “homogeneous system”. In contrast, in a heterogeneous system a revolutionary power will challenge international society and replace diplomacy with an arms race. Therefore, the obvious and central question for a foreign policy of the late 20th century was to devise means to reinvigorate a less-conflictual international society and facilitate diplomacy, i.e. find a common language across cultures, ideologies, historical references,

[2] In this sense, Bull’s (1977) understanding of international society is fundamental for Classical Realism and not only for the English School.

and state forms, for conceptualizing the nature of international order (Kissinger 1969).

In their attempt to come to grips with the historical differences between the classical Concert and its demise in the 20th century, scholars also pursued an analytical update (for more detail, see section III). For they had ended up distinguishing different types of international societies, such as homogeneous-heterogeneous or legitimate-revolutionary, which, in turn, presupposed different types of state motivations, as for instance status quo versus imperialist "powers" (Morgenthau 1948). But, of course, such distinctions begged many questions. Was it the fault of the international system if states became or stayed imperialist, a charge that Carr (1946) had leveled against the inter-war system? Or was it the revolutionary ideology of some states, which made it impossible for them to agree to the established rules of the international game, as some Cold War scholars would have argued?

Realists have been wavering between these system- and state-driven images of international society and in fact often combining them (see also Guzzini 1998: chapter 3). Two implications followed. On the one hand, it was crucial to be able to distinguish between international systems which were at the "pole of power" where worst-case thinking and containment would create order, and those systems at the "pole of indifference" where worst-case thinking and action would produce the worst-case by actually undermining the international order (Wolfers 1962). This distinction obviously grew from the dual lessons of World War I that could have been avoided by reassurance strategies, and World War II that seemed to result from applying reassurance or appeasement to a different case where they did not fit. On the other hand, if the foreign policy environment was not system-driven, but state-driven, then it was crucial to understand the "sources of foreign conduct" (see Kennan 1947) by looking carefully at the history of the great powers, their diplomatic and cultural traditions. This can, of course, be done in a classical historical way, as Gaddis' (1982) George-inspired analysis of US security policy after 1945 shows. But the closeness to some poststructuralism-inspired analysis should be noted (clf. Wæver 1994: 254ff.). In a quote which has always been central to Ole Wæver's interpretation of Kissinger, the latter writes writes that

"this is not a mechanical problem... an exact balance is impossible ... because while powers appear to outsiders as factors in a security arrangement, they appear domestically as expressions of a historical existence. No power will submit to a

settlement, however well-balanced and however 'secure', which seems totally to deny its vision of itself." (Kissinger 1957: 147)

In the end, it is only one step to go from this dual purpose of socializing and updating international society for the practitioner, to the other great difference that Classical Realism opposed to the upcoming FPA: the very subject matter of the study of foreign policy. With its clear observer status, mainstream FPA tended to look at foreign policy as decisions "as they really were", whereas the classical study of foreign policy was more openly normative (Bull 1966, 1977). FPA did have normative or political implications: knowing the bureaucratic reasons for decisions might help states both to redeem these problems by increasing crisis management capacity, and their partners/ opponents to better de-crypt individual decisions. However, classical scholars (and here George's type of FPA is a border case) would not simply dissect individual policy decisions, but rather examine decisions for the sake of understanding the wider historical and political context, namely the evolution of international society and national diplomatic traditions.

III. State Motivation

To the realist observer, the Versailles order was torn apart in the clash between revisionist and status quo states. E. H. Carr noted in 1939 that the order had been blind to the fact that "morality is the product of power" and that no one should be surprised if "dissatisfied Powers" declare war on the "sentimental and dishonest platitudinising of satisfied Powers" (1991, 83-84). State motivation was thus made a central concern of realism.

Realists claimed that *all states* play power politics, but continued that some states played power politics differently. Morgenthau, for instance, observed that the essential motivation—the lust for power—gives birth to three basic types of foreign policies: a "policy of the status quo" aiming to keep power; a "policy of imperialism" aiming to increase power; and finally a "policy of prestige" aiming to demonstrate power (1960, 39). This type of distinction is also found in the analysis of Arnold Wolfers (1984, 106) who declared that "differences in purpose for which power is sought … account for some of the great variations in the scope and intensity of the quest for influence and power."

The realist analysis of domestic politics implied that power was not an end (i.e., a goal inherent in human nature) but rather a means relative to the predominant values of a society. A society's cherished values are found in its "social-political institutions" (Waltz 1959, 40-41) and they, together with history and geography, make up particular "national situations" (Hoffmann 1966). Some states may long for past moments of glory and therefore become revisionist; other states may be content simply to preserve the status quo.

Realists thus moved beyond Morgenthau's pessimistic view of human nature and made international anarchy, the absence of world government, the foundation of theorizing. According to this view, anarchy makes it impossible for states to fully trust one another, even if all states have modest intentions. Thus is born the imperative to be on guard, and thus begins the spiral of armament and rearmament known as the "security dilemma" (Herz 1951).

Still, this only redefined the enduring analytical challenge of understanding how international power politics shape domestic motivation and policy. The one path realism cannot take is to argue that there is no necessary link because policy is essentially the outcome of "national situations" that by definition are unique. For instance, French actors and French history shape the foreign policy of France. By implication we would then have to accept that all we can do analytically is to watch and observe in order to pinpoint which states now happen to be revisionist, which states are status quo, and so on. However, if policy is decisively shaped by unique "national situations," and if these are disconnected from international power politics, then realism is incapable of analyzing policy because international power politics is at the heart of realism. For realism to have analytical relevance in the field of foreign policy analysis, it must demonstrate that power decisively shapes policy. If foreign policy making is wholly unconstrained by the environment and thus power politics, then policy making is a result of the free will of domestic politics. In other words, policy will be rooted in *Innenpolitik*, which is antithetical to realism (cf. Elman 1996, Rose 1998).

Realists have responded to this joint challenge in distinct ways. Defensive or neo-realists argue that states are basically motivated by security. Offensive or neoclassical realists argue that this introduces an unnecessary bias towards the status quo. They try to better understand revisionist states and argue that states seek mainly influence.

Defensive and offensive motivations in contemporary realist theorizing

The defensive realist argument is that states are incited above all to worry about their survival. The argument is particularly associated with Kenneth Waltz and structural realism (1979) but has been elaborated by other scholars as well (Walt 1987; Glaser 1996; Van Evera 1999). The position is "defensive" because the overriding goal of survival will cause states to worry about what they have and thus to be "defensive positionalists" or status quo states. It follows that states in principle will prefer balancing strategies in order to prevent the rise of dominating powers.[3]

"Offensive" realism is critical because defensive realism strictly speaking operates with all cops and no robbers (Schweller 1994, 1996). Revision, and thus offensive foreign policy, must enter the analytical equation somewhere in order to explain conflict. Put in other words, without bringing in the revisionist state, defensive realists will be left with a world of conflict in which there *in fact* is no conflict. Defensive realists normally respond that conflict may arise even between status quo states because the security dilemma prevents trust and fosters conflict. Yet the offensive realist criticism continues. If conflict is grounded solely in the security dilemma, and not in revisionist desires for expansion, then all conflicts are "irrational"—based on misunderstanding. This violates "realism's most basic tenet that conflicts of interests among states are genuine" rather than ephemeral and curable (Schweller 1996, 118). Analysts like Schweller therefore believe that defensive realists have placed too much emphasis on the security dilemma (i.e., the role of anarchy) and too little on clashing state motivations. As a direct consequence offensive realism assumes that power politics incite states to search for "influence," and not merely survival,[4] which in turn supports the argument that status quo and revisionist states, given their radically different motivations, pursue influence differently.

In this context, Randall Schweller (1998) is perhaps the modern realist who most directly addresses revisionism in world politics. Revisionism and status

[3] Kenneth Waltz (1979) argues that states balance power while Stephen Walt (1987) disagrees and says that states balance threats. The implications are quite different. Waltz would not allow a state to align with a bigger state whereas Walt finds such bandwagoning behavior natural if the threat is elsewhere. See also the discussion in Mouritzen (1997).

[4] The search for influence should be understood as an ambition for "conquest and expansion" (Schweller 1998, 21). Power is, then, as in classical realism, a means to gain influence.

quo, he argues, emerges from the degree of satisfaction with "the prestige, resources, and principles of the system." The ensuing distribution of satisfaction and dissatisfaction then gives birth to an alliances based on "balances of interests:" how much are status quo states willing to pay to uphold the order; and how strong is the status quo alliance relative to that of the revisionists? To provide answers Schweller first distinguishes between types of state interests, which represent an extension of the motivations found in classical realism: "lions" are strong status quo states, "wolves" are strong revisionists, and in between we find "doves, ostriches, and foxes." Finally he adds up these state interests to arrive at the systemic "balance of interest."

The defense-offense debate has mainly served to debunk some gross generalizations that have marred neorealist theory (Waltz 1979) and its rival, offensive realism (Mearsheimer 1990, 1994/95). Most realists today agree that states do not always seek either survival or influence, and they therefore use these general perspectives as analytical yardsticks. Sometimes the labels are therefore tools of expedient criticism in the intra-theoretical debate.[5] Yet there are reasons for maintaining the distinction. Defensive realists begin their analysis with the security dilemma, offensive realists theirs with the clash between status quo and revisionism, and often they generate distinct insights. Moreover, as will be clear in the next section of the article, the two camps analyze foreign policy processes differently.

At this stage we satisfy ourselves with the observation that defensive realists believe that status quo states tend to predominate, while offensive realists believe that revisionism is prevalent. This brings us back to the crucial question posed by classical realism half a century ago: how do we connect the typology of state motives to power politics (cf. Donnelly 2000)? In terms of the defensive-offensive debate the question is, will modern realism be able to identify the distinct sources of revisionism and status quo as well as the dynamics that transform revisionism into status quo? More generally, will it be possible to define sufficient scope conditions under which certain types of international material power distribution in combination with certain regime types can explain state motivation in realist terms? There is no escaping the

[5] Schweller (1998) thus focuses heavily on Kenneth Waltz as the "representative" of all defensive realists, while in the other camp we observe that Taliaferro (2000/01) wants to put all offensive realists in bed with Mearsheimer. Many offensive realists in fact prefer the label "neoclassical," to distinguish themselves from Mearsheimer and invoke the heritage of E. H. Carr and Arnold Wolfers.

fact that answers are lacking and that realists must view this question as crucial in their further research.

On the possibility of a systematic realist approach to state motivation

Let us illustrate the difficulties that realism still faces with an appraisal of Schweller's above-mentioned typology. While providing a novel interpretation of the clash of state interest that produced the Second World War, Schweller has also largely failed to account of the sources of revisionism (cf. Rose 1998). In particular, Schweller does not tell us why particular states become more or less satisfied with the international order. In fact, Schweller jumps from the correct assumption that states may be more or less satisfied to the observation that Germany in the 1930s was particularly dissatisfied, while Great Britain was very satisfied. We all "know" this was the case, but how did we actually get from theory to case? What should we do in order to apply the logic, e.g., to present-day Nigeria or Brazil? In short, how do we recognize a revisionist when we see one? In this respect Schweller has not responded to the gloomy remark of Wolfers (1962, 86): varying state motivations "rob theory of the determinate and predictive character that seemed to give the pure power hypothesis its particular value." Should realists accept indeterminacy or struggle against it?

The struggle for determinacy will be imperfect in the sense that it might be impossible to predict individual cases of revisionism. However, as the next section will develop, further research may enhance our understanding of the circumstances (configurations) under which revisionism is likely to emerge, notably in relation to the relative power "shocks" (i.e., the size and speed of power losses) states may experience.

Classical Realists have cautioned against impossible scientific hopes in the analysis of international affairs. Extrapolating on the potentially strict utilitarian premises of Morgenthau's realism, Aron (1962) shows that power cannot play the same role as money for economic theory. In other words, since there is no real-world political equivalent of money, all power measure is approximative and power relations are rather analogous to barter relations (Baldwin 1989). Therefore, there can be no theory of IR comparable to neo-classical marginal economics (1962, 102).[6] Instead Aron wanted to "préciser

[6] For a discussion of the excessive weight realist theorising puts on the narrow realist concept of power, see Guzzini (1993, 2000).

les variables qu'il faut passer en revue pour comprendre une constellation." On more hermeneutical grounds, Colin Gray (1999, 58-59), a neoclassical realist, has strongly opposed general theories and insists that there "is a cultural dimension to all that human beings think and feel about war and strategy."

This hermeneutic opening has probably narrowed the gap between realism and constructivism-inspired theories. Gray is an important figure to note because he quite clearly has rejected the idea that strategic behavior can be guided by material conditions only, as in a type of essentialist-materialist realism that is sometimes assumed by realist critics (cf. Johnston 1995). These critics fault realism for failing to focus on ideas and culture, and they argue that realism therefore is inferior to constructivist theories. However, the argument of Gray underscores that this image of realism is flawed, precisely because realism does analyze culture, as Johnston (1999) later recognized in a dialogue with Gray.

The theoretical gap persists, however. For constructivists, like Alexander Wendt (1999), the concepts of ideas and power do not belong exclusively to the domain of realism.[7] They insist that realists, while analyzing ideas and belief systems, do not recognize the way ideas shape the power and interests of the agent (e.g., the state) in the first place. In other words, realists tend to subsume ideas under belief systems and their impact on decision-making, but do not allow for the way they may constitute the agent, its power and interests. In return, realists criticize constructivism for conflating mind and matter. Constructivists fail to consider that norms are frequently violated by powerful actors and that "the material consequences of wrong choice can mean the death of millions and the extinction of political regimes" (Krasner 2000, 136). Realists argue, in short, that some ideas succumb because some actors have the material capacity to defeat them.

IV. Foreign Policy Processes

During the Peloponnesian war the Melians refused an alliance with Athens and suffered destruction and colonization, as Thucydides recounts. Why did

[7] For a discussion of Wendt's constructivism, see Guzzini and Leander (2001).

the Melians not bow to overwhelming power? Because they decided to uphold their 700 year tradition of liberty and, in their words, to "put our trust in the fortune that the gods will send" (1972, 407). From a more general perspective, the decision emerged because power does not "dictate" policy but represents the context within which particular policy-makers have room to make choices. This policy process and its relation to the greater context of power politics are analyzed differently by defensive and offensive realists.

Defensive realism and the (ir)rationality of process

Defensive realists work with the contrast between power dynamics (i.e., the security dilemma) and domestic dynamics. A typical argument from this perspective would be that it was rational for the Melians to cave in to Athenian pressure, but that they suffered the brutal consequences since their "decision-making process" resulted in a miscalculation. This contrast between environment and decision-making is pursued further by defensive realists who build on Robert Jervis' (1978) distinction between "fine grains" of power and the way in which they create rational choices for action.

The environment within which domestic decision-making takes place consists of "fine grains of power," which have four dimensions (Van Evera 1999, 10). The first concerns "first mover advantage:" if actors' gain from being the first to launch an attack, then the security dilemma is increased. The second is the overall balance of power: rapid and significant power shifts will aggravate the security dilemma. The third aspect is "cumulative resources": the security dilemma is again aggravated if the conquest of resources facilitate further conquest. Finally, the military balance of offensive and defensive forces, which includes military technology and geographical proximity: dominance by defensive forces will decrease the security dilemma.

Most defensive realists argue today that defensive weapons (i.e., nuclear weapons) dominate the "fine-grained balance of power" and that resources are not cumulative.[8] In short, moderate or non-aggressive behavior is rational in

[8] This disaggregation of power capabilities, from Jervis to Van Evera, may in part be seen as a response to the criticism that resources are not fungible across sectors and furthermore do not aggregate easily (Baldwin 1989; Guzzini 1993). Critics will note that military factors continue to dominate the fine grains of power, that the "offensive-defensive balance" continues to be an aggregate measure including very distinct factors such as national social structure and diplomatic arrangements, and finally that the fungibility of the fine grains has not been fully addressed (see e.g., Betts 1999).

the present world and aggression, then, is an "anomaly" that requires explanation. Defensive realists caution, however, that status quo states must strengthen their communication in order to reveal possible revisionists (Kydd 1997, Glaser 1996). Partly at odds with neorealist tenets, Joseph Grieco (1993, 1996) goes as far as to establish background conditions under which state sensitivity to relative gains decreases and cooperation occurs.

Once the nature of the security dilemma is assessed, the defensive realist may then turn to the domestic foreign policy process in order to find the causes of rationality or irrationality. Ideology is one important source of irrationality. Jack Snyder (1984) argues that political elites are constrained by their "motivational biases" and that this handicap increases if central motives are threatened and if international threats are diffuse. Snyder thus suggests that domestic polarization (i.e., clashes between the governing elite and the political opposition) in a time of international tranquility is a root cause of irrationality. In another study of imperial over-expansion Snyder (1991) suggests that closed political institutions[9] favor expansive policy deals between narrow elite cartels and, tragically, that these elites justify expansion with "imperial myths" that later make retreat impossible even if rational. Charles Kupchan's argument is similar, as he faults decision-makers for stirring up political forces that constrain their ability to "alter policy and avoid self-defeating behavior" (1994, 92), a conclusion also visible in Stephen Van Evera's (1990/91, 23-27) assessment of the relationship between nationalism and conflict.

Are democratic states better, then? At this point, the analysis turns towards integrating state structures or regime types. With their emphasis on open institutions and open debate, Snyder and Van Evera point in this direction. However, Van Evera (1999, 257) has also indicated that "speaking truth to power is seldom rewarded and widely penalized" in democratic states. Democracies are said to suffer from vague and abstract national security strategies that leave them poorly equipped for taking advantages of the opportunities offered by the fine grains of power. Moreover, some defensive realists (Posen 1984, Snyder 1984, Van Evera 1984, Desch 1999) argue that

[9] By closed political system Snyder understands a system that concentrates power in small groups within issue areas. In contrast, Snyder does not expect democracies, where power is diffused, and totalitarian states, where power is extremely concentrated, to suffer from the ills of cartelized systems.

military organizations (bureaucracies) in general seek to impose "offensive" military doctrines—in order to gain resources and autonomy—and may be best able to do so in democracies. The best opportunity for civilian decision-makers to control the military occurs whenever the fine grains of power create an intense threat that empowers civilian leadership.

Neo-classical realism and the primacy of power

Offensive or neoclassical realists analyze the policy process differently. They criticize defensive realism for making domestic politics the dumping ground for irrational behavior and thus for overlooking the role of deliberate expansion and aggression (cf. Zakaria 1992, Rose 1998). Based on their general assumption that states seek influence, neoclassical realists then examine how decision-makers respond to international power and seek to mobilize resources and support for new policies at home. In a foreign policy perspective offensive realists therefore focus on how added or declining power shapes new policy ambitions. Three illustrations follow.

Thomas Christensen (1996) and Fareed Zakaria (1998) distinguish between state and society to analyze the mobilization process. In Christensen's lens, decision-makers perceive the need for policy change but are constrained by domestic vested interests. In essence, decision-makers must then *buy off* the vested interests by adopting unnecessary but popular changes in secondary domains, which is to say that long-term security strategies can be built by manipulating peripheral, low-level conflicts. Zakaria links mobilization to the degree to which the state is *autonomous* from societal interests and has a *cohesive* central decision-making organization.[10] The greater the scope and strength of the central government, the faster the connection between greater power and greater foreign policy ambitions, although a liberal ideology and the value placed on minimal state power may retard the process.

Decision-makers' *perceptions* of power *shifts* play a key role in William Wohlforth's (1993) analysis of the Cold War. Based on Gilpin's (1981) version of realism, Wohlforth is interested in hegemonic competition and the dynamics of power.[11] Not relative power, but the perception of rise or decline

[10] Zakaria here invokes the heritage of Otto Hintze and Max Weber. For an attempt at state theory in more recent realist writings, see Krasner (1976), and Mastanduno, Lake and Ikenberry (1989), and Buzan (1991).

[11] For a discussion of Gilpin's version of realism, see Guzzini (1997).

is important for understanding war and change in world politics. The decline of Soviet power provoked an elite consensus around the need for policy change. Moreover the internationalizing global economy conditioned Gorbachev's choice of an internationalist policy (Brooks and Wohlforth 2000/01).

Finally, Sten Rynning's (2001) examination of French military doctrine argues that the scope of change depends on the intensity of change in international power, but also that the direction of change depends on the domestic policy process. A distinction between real and threatening balance of power changes is introduced as a framework for understanding the degree to which new policy blueprints are ambitious in their design for change. Next, Rynning borrows from the literature on organizational politics to account for the way in which blueprints are turned into real policy. Successful change must be built on strategic agenda setting by decision-makers; the institutional protection of reform proponents; and the use of allied agreement to exert pressure on domestic opponents.

This type of two-stage analysis must address some critical questions. Since international threats and opportunities often are ambiguous and since domestic processes are crucial to explaining policy, then the realist claim to do a two-step analysis (power and then process) risks falling apart: process is either dominant or at least equally important. Moreover, if perceptions actively guide the policy process it may be impossible to construct a neat link back to power. If the assessment of power is constructed and not objective, which realists accept, then perceptions and the standard behavioural answers become itself open for question. Although it is undeniable that the international power structure plays a role, realists, exactly because their empirical studies are often rich, find it increasingly more difficult both to pinpoint its exact role and, indeed, to define the international power structure in the first place.

V. Conclusion

Can it be done, or will realism succumb to or be absorbed by other theories? In the quest for answers to this crucial question the observer will notice two approaches. Defensive realists are likely to focus on their "fine grains" and link these to domestic dynamics—perhaps developed in cooperation with

other theories—in order to derive general explanations. Neoclassical realists note that measures of “relative national political power” are difficult to generate in the abstract and in consequence will aim to understand particular contexts of “security policy making” (Christensen 1996, 23-24). The approaches are different but also share two basic ideas: that the interaction of objective and subjective factors define the essence of foreign policy; and that policy processes are pushed and shoved by international power dynamics. This connection between international power and domestic policy process is at one time realism’s greatest strength, granting it a right to equal participation in the foreign policy debate, and its most pressing research agenda, calling on realism to take external criticism seriously.

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