The Relevance of Theoretical Assumption of Realist and Idealist Perceptions in International Relations Discipline

Jibrin Ubale Yahaya*

Department of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: Jibrin Ubale Yahaya, Department of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria, Tel: +2348035876786; E-mail: jibrinubaleyahaya@gmail.com

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Abstract

International Relations as an academic discipline which is also branch of political science and also an off-spring of the social sciences. The theories of international relations deal with "those policies of development and interactions the effect of which have impact across national boundaries and touches the lives of people rather imperative for nation states to interact in the process of defending or promoting their essential needs. Indeed, the ability of nation – state to achieve its goal and promote its national interests within the comity of nations, that has directly a consequence of the use foreign policy to achieve a certain goal within available resource and capabilities. However, our paper here is only to observe two perceptive approaches of International Relations with the scope area of theoretical assumption of realist and idealist (utopian) perception in the process of how countries interaction in the world, the idealist approach that is Utopian support their position by referring to the legal treaties as bases for promoting mutual respect for one another and the enhancement of regional and world peace, through membership in international organizations. States would appreciate the need to cooperate as the reality of inter dependence becomes stronger among the nations. While realism perspective view believe in "Power Politics approach" rejected the ideas of utopian and moralistic doctrine by idealistic thinkers and propose the notion and believe that international society, self-help is the best help in order to protect a nation interest. The paper argues that every country should not oppress or maltreat weaker countries in the process of achieving its national interest.

Keywords: National interest; World peace; Power politics; Legal treaties

Introduction

Scholars have adopted different approaches in the study of International Relations. An approach to International Relations consists of a criterion of selection; i.e. criteria employed in selecting the problem or questions to consider and selecting the data of which bring to bear in the course of foreign policy analysis. It consists of standards governing inclusion and exclusion of question and answers in the area scope of international relations activities [1].

There are various approaches for the study of international foreign policies from the two categories namely, classical approach and scientific approach. The systematic study of international relations is a fairly recent development. It actually began in the inter-war years, after the First World War when some writers attempted to explore the nature of behavior of states as it concerns about war and peace. Hitherto, has a view the field of International Relations was studied as diplomatic history.

International Relations as a field require some theoretical and analytical tools and approaches that could be used to provide understanding to international phenomena and indeed, to the behaviour of states so that the infantile discipline could move beyond mere description of events [2]. Our paper here would make an attempt to examine two of the dominant approaches to the study of international relational; Realism and Idealist "Utopian"

Historical Background of Theoretical Assumption of Realist vs. Idealist Perception

One important question worth asking is why sovereign states act the way they do. This has been an important question for students of International Relations. Both philosophers and political thinkers have sought to understand that the real motive behind the behaviour of nation states in their dealings with one another. It is question that bears relevance to the search for a theory of International Relations, Quincy Wrights position on this is quite helpful. According to him:

"A general theory of international relations means a comprehensive, coherent and self – correcting body of knowledge contributing to the understanding the prediction, the evaluation and the control of relations among states and of the conditions of the world"

While this definition appears complex, a coherent but simple definition is presented elsewhere.

"Theory is way of organizing our knowledge so that we ask questions worth answering to guide our research to valid answer in the area of international relations"

To put the argument in a simple form, a theory of International Relations should be able among other things to account for the multiplicity of actions and interaction among the participants at international level [3]. It also be a tool to explain, describe and predict developments arising from nations interaction it is a potent mechanism for interpreting and understanding why and how international actors play the way they do things and under what conditions.

Several approaches to the study of international relations can be identified, but for the purpose of this paper our research is limited only to two approaches which is idealist and the realist approach [4].

The Idealist Approach (Utopian)

The Idealist approach as a postulation has its origin in the write-up of distinguished jurist who believe that conflict amongst nation states could be managed and redressed through the instrumentality of an international organization. The idealists support their position by referring to the legal elements in international organization, international treaties as bases for promoting mutual respect for one another and the enhancement of regional and world peace. Idealism as a theory has its origin in the circumstance of the World War I with the massive destruction attendant to it [5]. The out-break of the war was caused because of the blind folded pursuit of the diverse national interest among member states. The proponent of this theory reject the notion of "balance of power" and argue that ways must be found to ensure that the diverse interests of member states are ameliorated and accorded meaningful expression to the global political activities.

The Idealist perspectives who are the utopian insist that the international system should be restricted in such a way that nation states would behave in the way they ought to behave. This would necessarily reduce the restricted promotion of conflict and the use of force to settle differences amongst sovereign nation states. The idealist who are utopian are convinced that through membership in international organizations. States would appreciate the need to corporate as the reality of interdependence becomes stronger among them.

As a leading member of the idealist theorist, President Woodrow Wilson of the USA was quite optimistic that once a world organization had been put in place, the differences among the nation states would be narrowed if not eliminated. His position was the First World War broke out as a result of the absence of this type of organization.

He insisted that the League of Nations when in place would be capable of regulating relations among member's states and thus prevent war. In his fourteen peace plan, he made manifest his optimism in this respect. Indeed the league emerged as the most impressive accomplishment of the idealist approach. The high expectations of the league were however wiped off with the outbreak of the World War II. According to Good speed, a new pragmatic organization with practical mechanisms was established in its place called the "United Nations" that promotes cooperation among states and has succeeded in preventing a World War III.

Another perception of utopian of the idealist approach. It regards the power politics as the passing phase of history and presents the picture of a future international society based on the notion reformed international system free from power politics, immorality and violence. It aims at bringing about a better world with the help of education and international organization. This approach is quite old and found its faint echoes in the declaration of the American war of independence in 1777 and French revolution of 1789.

The idealist regard power struggle as nothing but the passing phase of history, the theory proceeds with the assumption that the interests of various groups or nations are likely adjusted in the larger interest of humanity as a whole. The difficulty with this approach is that such a system could emerge only by following moral principles in mutual relations in place of power, which is not possible in practice [6].

Realist Approach

Many issues were raised after the World War II, there was paradigmatic shift from idealist to realism in the explaining the international politics. The scholars who believe with realism perception who are also called "Power Politics approach" rejected the ideas of utopian and moralistic doctrine as espoused by idealist thinkers.

The classical realism could be seen as the intellectual off shoot of early writers like Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau. However, the realism has gained tremendous popularity after World War II, replacing the extant idealist postulations.

Realism ideology was anchored on the assumption that human nature is "bad" sinful and wicked, that often times; generate conflict in the international system. Power, to the realists, is the currency of international politics and more of it a state has, the more it seeks. Realists assume further that in anarchic international society, self-help is the best help in order to protect a nation interest.

Realist writers questioned the validity of idealist, exceedingly moralistic and utopian prescriptions. To them, since the first law of nature is self-preservation, states are naturally guided by national interest defined in terms of power according to author it is the nature of state to acquire as much power as it can, because of the dangerous and anarchic world in which it exist.

However, some notable advocate of realism include: Reihold Niebhur, Nicolas Spykamn, KJ Holstic, George F Kennan. These writers were called "Modern" realist having written mostly after world War II. Also neo-realist of contemporart would politics would include Spanier (1998), Kissinger (2001), Brezezinsk (1993) and many others. The neo-realist subscribe to the basic assumptions of classical or modern realism except that they give contemporary credence to various factors that generate the perception of balance of power.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to make an exploration on the basic postulation of idealism Utopian and realism as an approach to the study of international relations. Looking at the contemporary happening events in the international system, it is possible to see the problem associated with the two classes of approach after adaptation of idealist utopian thikers perspectives why the structure did not stop the break out of World War II, while realism also failed to explain the end of cold war and the collapse, defeat or retreat of Soviet Union and also the problem of demise of power politics in Europe which had been the theatre virtually all major global conflict.

The failure of the balance of power system gave rise to the development of international organizations as a vehicle for ameliorating the conflict among states. Although the League did not succeeded in preventing the outbreak of the World War II, subsequent international organizations like UN must justify the reason of its formation by playing neutral status between the nation states of the World not only protecting the interest of super power countries to deprived the sovereignty of smaller states to avoid the break-out of World War III because of clear injustice within the international politics system, the writer was of the view of creating new world political system that will treat the countries of the worlds equally and respect the values and interest of the world countries in a diplomatic fair perspective to ensure interest of nation state is protected if the interest is not a threat to the global peace.

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