Realism in the Iranian Foreign policy

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Realism - overview

* foundations laid by Thucydides in 400 B.C., later by Machiavelli 15th and 16th century, and Hobbes in the 17th century, modern thinkers include Carr, Waltz, Morgenthau, and Grieco

* Main ideas: power and security (national interest), egoism, self-help, groupism

* Absence of international government = anarchy, Realpolotik – power decides who rules, balance of power

* Machiavelli: all men are wicked and will be malicious whenever possible, this is curbed within states by politics and hierarchy but

Realism = egoism

- Waltz: in anarchy, struggle for power even in the absence of an aggressor, human nature causes wars

- Morgenthau: human nature shows itself

- Seeking a less dangerous world, rather than a safe, peaceful one

- Hobbes: invasions happen for 1) gain, 2) safety, 3) reputation. Men are equal, interacting in anarchy = competition, glory, wanting to have equal share or a bigger one. Power balance needed, if not = conflict.

Structural realism

- Waltz: international structure created by interaction of states

- Constrains against certain action

- We have either hierarchy or anarchy, politics are conducted under both in different ways – Alexander Wendt: "Anarchy is what states make of it" (1992)

- Anarchy: all ensure their own survival, strong states "balance" by internal resources for security or alliances (relative gains)

- Hierarchy: weak states "bandwagon" with the latest winner, but risky if bad decision

Polarity in Realism

- More than one superpower

- Waltz: states seek at minimum own preservation (defensive realism), at maximum world domination (offensive realism), but ideally maintain their position in the system, mere survival too little, domination is risky to safety. In peace, sovereignty, independence and autonomy possible.

- Walt (Waltz's student): states balance against a threat, not all external capabilities

- Machiavelli: when about one's security, all justice go aside, but public opinion can also be a force, in int'l relat., survival rarely at stake

Realism in Iran – Dr Moshirzadeh

- 32% of Iranian scholars viewed Realism as the most helpful theory
- Realism best explains Iran's foreign policy
- Criticizes USA hegemony, delegitimizes it
- Iran, Turkey , Saudi = threat perception
- No Iranian Realist theory yet, all based on Western realism

Realism in Iran - origins

- historically bad experience with foreign powers (USA, UK, Russia) interfering, causing famine and poverty
- creating borders, dividing Iran into buffer zones, conflicts with neighboring countries (water issue, oil, agriculture)
- dragging Iran into wars despite stating independence
- forming Iran into a puppet of foreign governments up until the 1979 Islamic Revolution
- Khomeini played on nationality and Islam for cooperation

Realist Constructivism in Iran – identity, nationalism, ideology

- Realist constructivism as the policy of Iran due to links based on ideology and religion to other countries in the region:

- Afghanistan, Tajikistan (language, history, and religion)

- Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrkyzistan (Aryan race and Persian history), other Muslim countries (Islam, history)

- however Khomeini's fatwa on "national security comes before Islam" caused stronger nationalism during Iran-Iraq war (Shi'a unification expected)

- support for Sunni Palestine, or Christian Armenia against Muslim Azerbaijan = logical appropriateness (liberalism)

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Dr Moshirzadeh's lectures, University of Tehran, Faculty of World Studies, Term