

National Interest and International Security: A Theoretical Understanding

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Abstract

The author intends to address contemporary issues relating to international security through the lens of national interest. In addition such an analysis shall be conducted in the light of the Copenhagen School's views on international security through the eyes of Barry Buzan. Furthermore an amalgamation of Realist views on international security which engenders the idea that anarchy makes security the paramount foreign policy concern of the state shall also facilitate the comprehensive understanding of the organic link between these two concepts. The author nonetheless intends to analyze the relationship between national interest, power and international security through a number of case studies involving global powers. This paper shall further question whether international security is possible to achieve in the contemporary world. This research will be mainly based on primary sources such as speeches made by heads of state and United Nations resolutions. Secondary sources such as journal articles, books written on national interest and international security by John Baylis, Charles Kegley, and Martin Griffiths, "Foreign Policy" and "Foreign Affairs" magazine articles, and the international media shall also be used extensively. Therefore primary and secondary sources shall contribute to qualitative research with the absence of an experimental design. Hence the author shall produce content based analysis through archival research. Collected data on international security will be analyzed through the lens of national interest.

Key Words

National Interest, International Security, Foreign Policy, Realism, Copenhagen School.

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1 INTRODUCTION

American Drone attacks in Pakistan and Yemen, America's hunt for Edward Snowden and escalating tensions between Russia and the US, China's increasing influence over the disputed islands in the South and East China Sea, recent missile launch by North Korea and American B-52 flights amid spiking tensions between North Korea and the United States, the United Kingdom forcing the European Union to lift embargo on arming Syrian opposition and Sri Lanka strongly opposing the two resolutions adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council are some of the issues that can be designated as intimately affiliated to national interests and international security in the contemporary international arena. In framing the concept of national interest taking into consideration the other interchangeably interlinked principles of self-preservation, independence, territorial integrity, military security, and economic well-being are of paramount significance. Actual relations among nation states are primarily based on national interests of respective countries. Further in analyzing international security through the vantage point of national interest and in trying to fathom the link between these two concepts in a world order shaped by the emerging middle earth it is vital to further comprehend the fact that power is at the crux of both of these concepts. In addition national interest is a term that is one of the vaguest, easily used and abused by political leaders of almost every state.

2 NATIONAL INTEREST

“The goals that states pursue to maximize what they perceive to be selfishly best for their country.” (Kegley, 2009)

Power is the end of the objective for which states act, and national interest is the term used to justify such acts. Inherent human selfishness in acquiring power and its intimacy with national interest are illustrated above as perused by Charles Kegley Jr. in his critique “World Politics: trend and transformation.” Hence it cogently establishes the umbilical connection between power, and national security and foreign policy. The concept of national interest is therefore wholly a realist affair. Endeavouring to examine the relationship between national interest and international security, political realists have identified that statesmen think and act in terms of national interest defined as power. This nevertheless solidifies Morgenthau's observation that all international politics is a struggle for power. Like the pursuit of power, the promotion of the national interest is, according to the realist lexicon, an iron law of necessity. (Baylis, 2008) In understanding the selfish motivations of states through their national interests it is also important to reckon “that anarchy makes security the paramount foreign policy concern of states. Security, in turn, requires the acquisition and rational management of power (which can never be wholly divorced from military force), and only policies conducted in this spirit can serve the national interest.” (Griffiths, 2008)

The state comprises of elements that constitute the vital needs and national interests are considered to be the generalized concept which symbolizes those elements. Such vital needs may differ and can be defined in a diverse manner by states in different contexts. Generally, these include self-preservation, independence, territorial integrity, military security, and economic well-being. The concept encapsulates a very broad area and therefore no specific interest dominates the policy-making functions of government. As a consequence it is credible to grasp the concept in a plural manner as “national interests.” If it is used in the singular form, national interests may be defined as the general and continuing ends for which a nation acts on the general long-term and continuing purpose which the state, the nation all see themselves as serving. In this way, the national interest is different from other interests and supra national interests and is characteristically, the long-term, primary, and the highest. It has residual meanings and it may be finally reduced to either national survival or national security. Nonetheless the term national interest is used as a justification, to evade individual responsibility, for propaganda and as a standard in political action. In assimilating this concept into the security terminology an intimate nexus can be drawn between national security and national interest. International security, human security and security dilemma fall within the ambit of national security and such concepts are proven to be synonymous under the umbrella of national interest.

Furthermore national interest is also considered as a factor which contributes to a greater extent in the formulation of a country's foreign policy. Geoffrey Stern in his critique “The Structure of International Society: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations” provides two separate connotations stemming from the word ‘national.’ According to Stern “it could be reference to the state as such or to the people of a state.” (Stern, 1999) He further explains how national interests are misused and abused by the government in power “in an attempt to cling to office in times of trouble, equate the administration's interest with that of the state. Indeed it has become standard practice for governments to claim that the country would suffer greatly were there to be a transfer of political power to the opposition. This is not to say, however, that ‘the national interest’ is merely a rhetorical device to serve the interests of the ruling elite. For the operative decision makers may genuinely believe that their conception of it advances in some sense ‘the general good.’ But in determining its content, they may allow personal vanity, regional bias, religious fanaticism, ideological zeal or gender-based considerations – in particular the idea that a woman prime minister or president can be as tough if not tougher than a man – to enter into the calculations.” (Stern, 1999)

A nexus can also be drawn between international law and the national interest. The attitude of states in the current international arena towards national interests has drastically changed since the inception of the Westphalian Treaty in 1648 due to the subjective nature of the concept. "Two centuries ago it was acceptable to wage war with hired foreign mercenaries; now it is not. Killing and enslaving the inhabitants of conquered countries, a common if brutal practice in Thucydides' day, would make a state a total outlaw today. Wars to acquire territory, normal enough in the seventeenth century, are increasingly regarded as unacceptable." (Lumsdaine, 1993) If international law is to be observed from a realist perspective then international law is considered as an obstacle in furthering the interests of states. A contrary view expressed by the constructivists establishes the relationship between national interests, state behaviour and international law. "Laws, domestic and international, are typically obeyed because people identify with the norms of behaviour they embody. This is consistent with the constructivist view that states behave on the basis of shared understandings of what is appropriate behaviour. So merely looking for instances where international legal norms constrained state behaviour underestimates their importance; we also need to appreciate how legal norms influence definitions of national interest in the first place." (Shimko, 2010)

Hans J. Morgenthau draws a link between the concept of power and national interest in "Politics among Nations" but shorts fall of defining what national interest is. His observations include reference to foreign policies of countries and their affiliation to national interest. Further he postulates that "no nation has the resources to promote all desirable objectives with equal vigour: all nations must therefore allocate their scarce resources as rationally as possible. The indispensable precondition of such rational allocation is clear understanding of the distinction between necessary and variable elements of national interest...the necessary elements of the national interest have a tendency to swallow up the variable elements so that in the end, all kinds of objectives, actual or potential, are justified in terms of national survival." (Morgenthau, 1985) It is further emphasized in his book that the concept of national interest does presume neither sustainable peace nor the inevitability of war. States embark on an ambitious journey in pursuit of their national interests and therefore the possibility of conflict and threat of war is minimized through "the continuous adjustment of conflicting interests" (Morgenthau, 1985) through diplomacy. Morgenthau in addition also provides in his "Great Debate" (Morgenthau, Another "Great Debate": The National Interest of the United States, 1952) that national interests comprise of logically required element and a variable element determined by circumstances. National interest is a standard of action which includes sub-national interests and supra national interests.

However “in defence of the concept of national interest, for all its analytical shortcomings, it cannot be denied that many governments today do continue to use it as a basis for the conduct of their foreign policy. The foreign minister of Australia, in a 2002 speech in advance of the publication of a government paper ‘Advancing the National Interest’ states that: ‘The Government has ensured that Australia's national interest is advanced in an ambitious yet pragmatic and clear-minded fashion. Because if we don't... no one else will’. (Hough, 2008)

2 INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

“In case of security, the discussion is about the pursuit of freedom from threat. When this discussion is in the context of the international system, security is about the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity.” Barry Buzan (Baylis, 2008)

The concept of security has drastically changed through the ages. A juxtaposition of traditional threats and non-traditional threats to security has mutated this concept thus widening the orthodox approach toward security. The rise of natural disasters, global warming, emergence of piracy and other contemporary non-military threats to human security have reshaped the whole definition of security. Therefore new risks associated with the environment, poverty, and weapons of mass destruction are facing humanity, just as a time when the nation-state is in crisis. Albeit these are thoughts of the Copenhagen School spearheaded by Barry Buzan and albeit such non-traditional threats do have a direct impact on national interests and the author is very much concerned in shedding light on military threats to international security thus analyzing its impact on national interests.

Realism even in international security has had a timeless impact. The realist depiction of the international environment underscores the significance of the survival of the state and the priority of the leaders of the state to ensure and safeguard the sustainability and security of the state and its survival. “Under anarchy, the survival of the state cannot be guaranteed. Realists correctly assume that all states wish to perpetuate their existence... This is partly explained in light of the power differentials of states. Intuitively, states with more power stand a better chance of surviving than states with less power.... Yet irrespective of how much power a state may possess, the core national interest of all states must be survival. Like the pursuit of power, the promotion of national interest is according to realists, an iron law of necessity.” (Baylis, 2008) Another theory presented in supporting the justification of state's hunger for power and dominance in the international arena was expounded by Kenneth Waltz in “Structural Realism.” In his “Theory of

International Relations” he emphatically argues that “states tend to expand not because of the fact of their existence in a world without government, in which power is dispersed, life is precarious and there is no sense of international solidarity. In such a world, each country faces a security dilemma, and expansionism may be conceived as a way of coping with the logic of the situation.” (Griffiths, 2008)

Nonetheless international security is directly affected as a consequence of national interests of states. India is an emerging or would be super power. India is acknowledged as a regional super power or a mini super power. Albeit a shackled giant she engenders all necessary residues for her to become a global power. Besides she possesses the seventh largest territory, housing 16% the second largest population of the world. (Chandra, 2004) In addition she has the third largest pool of manpower. Also India has the third largest military force, the fifth largest air force and a navy with full-fledged blue water capability, with three air craft carriers and nuclear submarines. Moreover India is recognized as a pillar of the Non-aligned Movement, a pioneer of the Commonwealth of Nations, and the protagonist of the third world countries. Besides India is also recognized as the spokesman of the Afro-Asian bloc at the United Nations and as the guide of the Group - 77. Thus with an abundance of natural resources, with an immense pool of technical and scientific man-power, with the third largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity and with sophisticated nuclear and space programmes India can legitimately aspire for the super power status in the next century.

On the other hand “China’s economy has grown since its economic reforms in 1980s at a compound annual rate of about 10%. This has made China one of the world’s wealthiest countries. These resources have positioned China, formerly regarded as a sleeping giant, to awaken and play an increasingly active role on the global stage. To convert economic power into geostrategic power, China has implemented an aggressive military modernization programme on a crash basis, and has steadily increased its defence spending. At the same time, Chinese leaders have repeatedly asserted that China seeks peaceful relations with all the great powers.” (Kegley, 2009) These two emerging titans have shaped the contemporary international arena with their ambitious goals. In such a context Professor Graham Allison of the Kennedy School at Harvard commonly warns the United States and China not to fall into the “Thucydides Trap” (Holmes, 2013) due to the dangers two parties face when a rising power rivals a ruling power. It is therefore plausible to discern that international security is influenced by the actions of the United States, China and India and the objectives each of them pursue reflect the relevance and significance of national interests of those states in analyzing international security.

China's disputes with its neighbours are a result of China's expanding national interests. Given the fact that China is an emerging power it would wish to flex its muscles and twist the arms of its contenders. Any obstacle in preventing the achievement of national interests shall be regarded as a security threat and shall be dealt with coercion. Sending nuclear submarines on secret missions to the Indian Ocean and sending navy boats to "maintain peace" in the South China Sea may antagonize certain powers and neighbouring states but it is merely a show of force rather than a use of power. Similarly America's intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq and establishing democracy may be designated as one of America's foreign policy priorities and one of the main national interests. Secret spying conducted by the National Security Agency on the emerging powers and the European states may have served the national interests of the United States. Cyber wars existing between China and America may also have served national interests of both the parties. But such activity may not only destabilize international security but may paralyze cooperation and diplomacy among global powers. The impact of actions taken by such powers in strengthening national security may be felt at the global level.

Another concept which comes under the security terminology for national interest is human security which is "a measure popular in liberal theory of the degree to which the welfare of individuals is protected and promoted, in contrast to realist theory's emphasis on putting the state's interests in military and national security ahead of all other goals." (Kegley, 2009) The Copenhagen School approach to security as mentioned earlier has undoubtedly widened the concept of security. Moreover Former Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan also added that "human security can no longer be understood in purely military terms. Rather, it must encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament, and respect for human rights and the rule of law... Moreover, these pillars are interrelated; progress in one generates progress in another." (Baylis, 2008) The United Nations Human Development Report 1994 provides a list of threats to human security; economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. (UNDP, 1994) However emerging powers may attempt to strengthen human security only if such facilitate the acquisition of national interests and only if they are not inimical to the goals and objectives of the state.

3 POWER

Power may be considered as the glue that binds national interests to security. Statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power. National interest is national survival and survival is the minimum requirement of a nation. "From Hobbes to Foucault,

philosophers have always found 'power' intertwined with the human condition, with Nietzsche suggesting that the feeling of power (*Gefuehl der Macht*) has become both the greatest love of and a 'demon' to humans. Contemporary writings most frequently refer to Max Weber, whose insights influenced a number of important works on 'power' including those of Robert Dahl, Hans Morgenthau, Raymond Aron, and Michael Mann." (Berenskoetter, 2007) Moreover in analyzing power in international relations Charles Kegley in his book "*World Politics: Trend and Transformation*" stresses that this concept is as ambiguous as national interests and is therefore difficult to measure. He further provides that "most leaders follow *realpolitik* and operate from the traditional construction that conceives of power as a combination of factors that give states the capability to promote national interests, to win in international bargaining, and to shape the rules governing interaction in the global system... If we view power as the means to control when conflict or disputes over incompatible interests occur, it is reasonable to ask, who is stronger and who is weaker? The answer to this question may predict which party will get its way and which will be forced to make concessions. These considerations invite the more fundamental question, 'what empowers states to achieve their goals?'" (Kegley, 2009)

4 DRONE STRIKES – NATIONAL INTEREST – INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

It is understood that drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen are conducted against the principle of sovereignty and international law. Such attacks not only kill terrorists but also result in innocent civilian deaths. Nevertheless the President of the United States (U.S.) has express authority to conduct drone strikes in order to secure Americans. The Congress passing the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) enabled the president to use force as a constitutional responsibility in the domestic context and furthermore such use of force can be extended to the international arena under the right of self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. The U.S. spends lavishly on military research and development in order to counter terrorism and to protect its citizens home and abroad. As a consequence drone strikes are proven to be precise, lethal, effective and cheap. Given the economic crisis in the states, drones have become an indispensable weapon in the war against terrorism. Nevertheless these controversial drone attacks are not without profound implications. Ironically ethical and legal constraints do challenge these covert attacks making those increasingly contentious. According to General Michael Hayden, the former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director, "... they are not assassinations. This is a war, this is action against opposing armed enemy force. This is an inherent right of America to self-defence. I can only fulfil my moral and legal responsibilities to the citizens of my republic by taking this war to this enemy wherever they may be." (BBC, 2011) Contrariwise such justifications are contested

on ethical and legal grounds by Richard N. Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations. While encouraging the Obama Administration to balance “legitimacy” and “self-preservation” he questions what “Americans think about violating the sovereign space of other countries and killing a U.S. citizen who is a ‘senior operational leader’ of al-Qaeda or an associated group?” (Wall Street Journal, 2013)

However there is strong backing from the bureaucrats in Washington to conduct and continue unmanned drone attacks in strengthening America's security. The former U.S. Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta has been a strong supporter of such strikes and has made a number of statements in support of drone strikes in Pakistan. According to Panetta, “we have made it very clear that we are going to continue to defend ourselves... This is about our sovereignty as well.” (BBC, 2012)

5 CHINA'S AMBITIONS-NATIONAL INTEREST-INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

The re-emergence of the middle east is undoubtedly changing the contemporary world order thus rebalancing the power in the international arena. The rise of the dragon and its growing appetite for power is emphatically visible through its strategic foreign policy. “Much of the debate about the rise of China since the early 1990s has addressed two questions: How fast are China's economic and military capabilities increasing? And how should the world, especially the United States, respond to this emerging great power?... What is China's grand strategy.... assessing the significance of China's growing capability, whatever its trajectory, and the advisability of alternative ways of responding to it requires a grasp of the way leaders in Beijing seek to realize their nation's interests given the constraints imposed by their own resources and the international context within which they must operate.” (Goldstein, 2005) China in becoming the cynosure of global trade and diplomacy, has intensively used soft power over hard to be admired and respected in the international arena. China's veto at the United Nations Security Council, China's increasing number of investments in Africa, China's warming relations South Korea and Australia, China's Neo-liberal agenda in South East Asia, and China's climate diplomacy reflects that “Chinese leaders have moved quickly to grasp the distinction between hard power and soft power and begun to make efforts to increase China's soft power while building its hard power to enhance China's global influence.” (Zhao, 2009) China has also pursued its military and security interests by introducing a new air craft carrier, fifth-generation J-20 fighter planes, (Axe, 2011) air craft carrier buster missiles, land and sea based Surface to Air Missiles, (Defence, 2012-2013) and unmanned aerial vehicles.

China's national interests are shaped by its growing appetite for energy, resources and markets. The official web page of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, the foreign policy section is titled “China's diplomacy aims at

safeguarding national interests, promoting world peace.” (China's Diplomacy Aims at Safeguarding National Interests, Promoting World Peace, 2013) This therefore clearly identifies the significance of national interests as a determinant of China's foreign policy. China's rise inspires a mix of awe, fear and scepticism. But what will its global role be? Are we on the brink on a bi-polar world? How will its neighbours respond? Will it all come crashing down? Are some of the questions which could only be answered through identifying and understanding national interests of rising China.

6 CONCLUSION

National interest and international security, albeit vague and ambiguous, are two important concepts in the study of international relations. Given the contemporary world order these two concepts are of cardinal importance. Realism has provided a sound footing for the analysis of national interests, power and international security. The Copenhagen School or the wideners of security have identified that “threats and vulnerabilities can arise in many different areas, military and non-military, but to count as security issues they have to meet strictly defined criteria that distinguish them from the normal run of the merely political. They have to be staged as existential threats to a referent object by a securitizing actor who thereby generates endorsement of emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise bind.” (Hough, 2008) The author has further perused the nexus between national interests and international security and the contribution of power in bringing those concepts under the umbrella of foreign policy.

American drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen and China's ambitious rise to the super power status are two of the case studies the author has discussed thus assimilating the concepts of national interest and international security. However it is credible to deduce the fact that since the end of the Cold War international security has transformed into a complex puzzle. Drone strikes can be justified and has been justified by the Obama Administration and through the Brennan Doctrine in establishing that such attacks are in the interest of America and its security. China's aims in becoming a super power and how China's national interests affect regional and international peace and security was brought to light through the South China Sea issue. China's use of soft power in the global stage also shows that China would like to be respected and treated as an emerging global power. Nevertheless these case studies establish that national interests and international security are interlinked and power is at the crux of international relations.

Realism therefore perfectly illustrates why states pursue goals, why they have national interests, what they do to acquire power and how their ambitious plans affect national and international security.

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