

## **The Realist Approach to Understanding the State and it's Politics in Nigeria: A Theoretical Analysis**

**Olawole Ojo**

*Department of Political Science and Public Administration  
Babcock University Ilisan- Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria  
E-Mail: Ojool@babcock.edu.ng*

**Babatunde Olomu**

*Department of Political Science and Public Administration  
Babcock University Ilisan- Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria  
E-Mail: babatfund@yahoo.com*

### **Abstract**

Realism as a theory has been a prominent concept in international relations and has been used to explain the activities of political leaders and states in the international system. From the realist perspective, incompatible goals and conflict are the defining features of world politics. Without enforceable international rules, decision makers have little choice but to compete with other states for security, status and wealth. Consequently, most of the crux of political activities has been attached to the practice of the realist theory in its real nature. This paper adopted a theoretical approach in its analysis by juxtaposing the relevance of realism and its applicability to the Nigerian state and global politics. The paper found out that the lack of political will, power drunk and sit tight mentality of the leaders in Nigeria as well as the hegemonic nature of global politics is as a result of the applicability of realism in its full nature. These are manifested in conflicts and wars against states and internal politics; such as killings of political opponents, hacking of websites, vote buying, subversion of outcome of electoral results and other forms of electoral malpractices. The study then concluded that the outplay of politics in the Nigerian state and the world at large is dirty, brutal, nasty, solitary just like the state of nature posited by Thomas Hobbes. It then recommended constitutional engineering to chart a course for the state particularly in the developing society such as Africa, Asia and Latin America.

**Keywords:** The state, Realism, Politics, Theory.

### **1. Introduction**

In its tradition political thought on realism has dominated thinking about international politics over a thousand years. As it suggests, writers and political theorists associated with realism claim to view the world as it is and not as it ought to be. In terms of domestic politics, a primary concern for any ruler is stability of the political system thus staying in power. Without some degree of order or internal stability, it is difficult to pursue other political, economic or social objectives. Hence the challenges of establishing authority have drawn the attention of many realist writers. In terms of international relations, realists emphasize the struggle for power and influence among states, empires, and principalities. At a minimum, all such political entities seek security. Some, however, may have a more extensive agenda of opportunities to pursue and may even aspire to regional or world conquest.

All realists agree, that the mere existence of independent states, empires, or principalities reject the notion of being subject to the authority of any other political unit, thus creating a dynamics that encouraged competition and violence. Viotti and Kauppi (2009) D;Aneri(2014). In other words, international relations are conducted in a condition of international anarchy or, as the seventeenth-century writer Thomas Hobbes also termed it, a world in which there is “no common power”. No central, global power exists to enforce peace among the various political units, whether they are city-states, empires, principalities, or modern states. As a result, a political leader’s primary concern is to protect the national security of the country. At a minimum this means defending the physical and territorial integrity of the state.

For many realists according to Viotti and Kauppi (2009), Lanborn (2013) the competitive and often warlike condition of international relations is essentially the result of some combination of factors-human nature or the psychology of individuals and dynamics of small groups; the nature of certain types of states or societies; and the structures or distribution of power among states. Structural realists (sometimes called neorealist) look to this distribution of power among states or “structure” as affecting the behaviour of states within an international system of states: a unipolar structure in which one dominant state has capabilities or power well above all of the others, such as the united states and the former soviet union during the cold war (1945-1991); and a multipolar structure , the most common form historically, such as Europe in the nineteenth century and the period between World War 1 and World War II (1919-1939).

Power is important to achieving the objectives or satisfying the interests of states. International organizations, alliances, and other coalitions are merely mechanisms used by states to exercise their power in the conduct of their international relations. For some realists, the pursuit of power by states is not so much a means to achieving these ends; indeed, it becomes an end in itself. The state’s concern both for its security in an anarchic world and its capacity to achieve its other purposes make it focus on its relative power position in relation to other states; it wishes to strengthen rather than weaken its power position in relation to other states. To realists, whether power is sought as a means or an end in itself, it is the acquisition and use of power by states that tends to produce or result in an equilibrium or balance of power. Some realists see states, particularly the most powerful (or great powers as they are sometimes called), as actively constructing power balances to assure the best position they can in such balances. Others realists see balance of power as something that simply occurs, whether or not states will such an outcome.

According toMachiavelli, in Anifowose and Enemuo(2015) who is considered to be the first truly modern political theorists laid emphasizes on what is as supposed to what should be which a hallmark of realist writers. To him, as suppose to many earlier Greek and roman writers, the purpose of politics is not to make people virtuous, nor is the purpose of the state to pursue some ethical or religious end. Rather politics is the means to pursue and enhance the internal and external security of the state. Unless security is achieved, as Machiavelli claimed, the pursuit of all other goals is pointless. Domestic tumour or conflict is avoided by having good laws and keeping the people satisfied. Machiavelli agreed with other realists that a permanent or perpetual peace is a dangerous illusion and any leader who succumb to such illusions risks losing his country’s liberty and sovereignty.

Likewise, Thomas Hobbes along with Thucydides and Machiavelli is renowned for his contribution to the realist perspective on global relations and his principal concern was with the establishment of domestic authority or the state, such as determining the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. It is important to note that Hobbes discussion on the state of nature has had an important impact on realist thinking about global relations. Essentially, scholars of international relations have come to see his arresting image of the state of nature as analogous to the anarchy of the international system a world without central authority. Hobbes did not claim that the state of nature he describes before the creation of civil society “actually existed”. Rather, his imagination was what the world or particular society will be like without governmental authority or other social structures. His starting point was to describe basic human nature. Defining this therefore has an obvious impact on the type of

government required to ensure a stable political order. If human nature is essentially benign, little coercive power is required. If however as he believed, people are ruled by passions, a strong central authority would be required. If government did not exist, we will have to create them.

## **2. Core Features of Realism**

The theory came into existence as a result of the failure of liberalism to prevent another outbreak of war because it did not pay close attention to the realities of power politics. In addition, the emergence of the realist school of thought influenced international relations greatly that it expanded the study across states and boundaries. The realist emerged and influenced international relations by first refuting the contents of the liberal school of thought and then focusing on its aim which is power politics or power of states rather than international institutions of the liberal school of thoughts.

In other words, the focus here was basically on security and power politics which came into limelight after the failure of liberalism to prevent another World War. The theory also focused on European ideas, views on nature of politics and impact of Cold War with the possibilities of nuclear war. In the opinion of the realist, it is believed that the most important actor in international relations is the "State" because relations from states to states across the globe helps to dictate what global politics will look like. In the same vein, states are self-interested and mistrustful of other states and by so doing; it makes cooperation difficult in World Politics. Ultimately, this school of thought believes that foreign policy making is been influenced heavily by issues that concerns security that affect states cutting across boundaries.

In addition to the aforementioned, scholars like Carr, Morgenthau that belongs to the classical Realism school of thought posit that the nature of human tells heavily on why world politics is Conflictual because human beings are naturally selfish, aggressive and Conflictual to the extent that the thinking, actions and inactions are usually after interests which is influenced by power. In other words, all what humans are after is how he will achieve is personal interest by all means at every point in time. This in turn led to the belief that politics during the 19th and 20th centuries were struggles between the rich and powerful states versus the poor and weak states. On the other hand, the Neo-Realism posited by the likes of Waltz, Mearsheimer to mention a few believes that the issues of security rest on the shoulder of individual states and cannot be assured by anybody especially in an anarchist context. In the neo-classical realism propounded by scholars like Machiavelli, Christensen e. t. c. believes that the centre stage of world politics is determined by the power of states together with the activities of their leaders in world politics.

In a nutshell, the realist contends that conflicts among states on global stage is inevitable because no authority has the capability to defend their interests as they must rely on the resources of their own states to help themselves as regards security most especially. In the same vein, international institutions have no influence over World politics independent of states that support them because states have their own sovereignty and therefore all that each of the states are always after is their interests. Should there be anything or directive for any states on the globe, the state can decide to accept or decline the directive from the international institution because the state is independent and sovereign. Therefore, it transcends that political action is solely determined by power not morality because there is no universal morality to guide the states. State interests are simply defined in terms of Power.

## **3. The State and Realism**

According to Anifowose and Enemuou (2015), Johari (2012), Ayeni (2008) the force theory of the state holds that the state originated in conquest and coercion. It is the result of the subjugation of the weaker by the stronger. In the later part of the 29<sup>th</sup> century, some German philosophers argued that force was the most characteristics attribute of the state, that "might made right" and that power has its own

justification. Hence, it was concerned that physically powerful peoples were the “best” and the state as power, was superior to other forms of human associations. The force theory, accordingly, has no respect for the natural rights of the citizens and does not approve of any resistance to the acts of political authority. The Nigerian Politics has been seen as “dirty” involving a do or die affair where leaders believe that they have to do whatever it will take to get to power. By so doing, this power seeking leaders, go the desperate ways by killing and sharing arms to men to fight their way to the seat of power. The realist theory’s application in the Nigerian politics could be seen in the challenges of lack of political will, vote buying, killings to get to power, acquiring all forms of power by all means to mention but a few. Evidently, in the Nigerian politics, we see now that whenever elections are coming or during the conduct of any election across the country, there is usually oppression by the leaders using military might to intimidate civilians and by so doing, anyone that comes their way to stop them pay the price with his or her life.

By the same token, since the realist theorist believes majorly on security and power, the perspective of realist like Machiavelli (1532) in his book “the Prince” advised leaders to do anything it takes to get to power, including deceit and violence is what is obtainable in the Nigerian Politics. Machiavelli perspective of power ascendancy and acquiring has been synonymous to that of a dirty, brutal and nasty politics which we have seen in the Nigerian State. The Nigerian Politics in view of the Machiavellian’s perspective is rooted in this perspective because the leaders do not want to care how they get to power but all they care about is getting there even if it takes marching on people’s life and blood to get there.

In addition to the above, the bad omen and political challenges of lack of political will, vote buying, do or die affair, killing to get to power to mention a few is sadly rooted in the realist school of thought in connection to what the Nigerian politics says. Since power is said to be one of the major bone of contention in the realist point of view, what the leaders do is to acquire that political power by all means and then acquire other forms of power which includes Economic, Security etc. It is sad that all this challenges are found in a state that has the potentials and intellectuals of becoming one of the best or if not the best country to live in across the globe. The drunkenness and misuse of power by the Nigerian leaders proves what Abraham Lincoln said about power which says that “all men can face adversities but if you want to know a man give him power”. That is why they say that power corrupt, absolute power corrupt absolutely.

#### Religion, the State and Realism

Religion is the opium of the people and it is the medium and avenue through which the people commune with their maker and God. Religion has been considered as the spiritual antidote and therapy for the people whenever they are in difficult situation as well as a source of healing when they are sick. Therefore, the issue of religion is central to spiritual and physical growth of the people. It is in the light of this that St Thomas Aquinas holds that the state arose out of man’s social nature and that the promotion of the good life is its purpose(Johary2012) As a result, government is needed to as the organ for looking after the common good. According to him, the ultimate purpose of man and the good life transcends what can be attained in this world. This as he opined ‘through virtuous living man is further ordained to a higher end, which consists in the enjoyment of God’. But he said this objective can only be attained by divine power and not through human government. To Aquinas, political authority derives from God and therefore deserves to be obeyed. In the view of St. Thomas, according to Anifowose and Enemu (2015), political authority derives from God and therefore deserves to be obeyed. To Him, he classifies government into two. Those that aim at the goods of God and those that aim at the interest of the ruler alone. The former is the just type while the latter is bad. On the church and state St. Thomas Aquinas supports church supremacy over the state. He argues that since the true end of man is to attain virtue and through that qualify for the eternal enjoyment of God, the organisation through which this is attained must be superior. He reasons that circular government should be subordinate to the church because the latter is concerned with ultimate purpose, which is the salvation of souls.

Consequently, what is happening in global politics today is nothing more than the promotion and the realisation of selfish interest through whatever means regardless of the injustices that followed it. It means therefore that if the will of God is not done by the state evil will continue to persist and peace will continue to elude the citizens of the state

#### **4. Realism and Global Politics**

According to Viotti and Kauppi (2009), Goldstein and Pevehouse(2013), D'Anieri(2014). A useful imagination that captures the approach to the study of international relations and world politics is like a chess board and a game in an open field. Just as chess consist of deferent actors, King, Queen, Rooks, Bishops, Puns; so too does international relations and world politics. To them the realm of international relations and world politics is a three dash level game of chess, with at least three games in progress at once; security, economy, and identity. Within and between each game various levels of inter dependency exist. But to make the game even more of an analytical challenge the actual size and boundaries of the chess boards are unclear. The constituent elements and complex multi-dimensional nature of contemporary world politics are continually evolving. They believe that most observers would agree that the state continues to be the pre-eminent actors in world politics, but because of globalisation and crisis of authority in world politics this may or may not be the case at the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Again Viotti and Kauppi (2009), Lamborn and Legold(2013), reflects three other concepts in world politics which are security, economy, and Identity. Security to them often built in terms of the basic survival, welfare and protection of the state existing in an international system characterised by self-help. Because most states are not in position to carry such a financial burden, hence some place much greater faith on the role of international organisation, alliances and negotiated agreements; ranging from trade and commerce to controlling armaments; as a means not only to reduce the financial cost of security but also to sustain and expand a sense that we live in a truly global society. To them others argue that class interest dictate how security is defined. In effect, security is whatever the elites representing the dominant class say it is.

Discussions on the international economy generally evolve around monetary issues, trade, finance and aid. Economic issues are particularly important as they influence a state's overall power. As many observers believe that the international economy is a critical aspect of world politics and raises issues of global disparities and inequalities. Therefore, achieving minimum economy subsistence is the goal of the vast majority of humanity.

Identity involves the answer the question of 'who am I and whit whom do I identify'? In terms of international relations and world politics, identity is most often associated with the state and nation and the values, culture and the people who fall within that state borders. For realist, states power and the balance of power is a central organising concept. For instance, nationalism as an identity with political ramifications can be a cause of war as well as a means to mobilizes popular support in defence of the country.

The struggle over this three issues and the inter relations particularly, the security dimensions and identity, define much of what is important and interesting today about international relations and world politics. All the three concepts relate not just to the desires of the individual but also to the collective aspirations of the peoples in state and societies throughout the world

The Term World politics or Global politics is a more inclusive term because it captures much of today's reality to include not only state and international organisation, but a wild range of transnational actors, the phenomenon of globalisation, vast social and economic global inequalities, and emergent global norms

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

From the findings, outplay of politics in the Nigerian State and globally is dirty, brutal, nasty, solitary just like the state of nature posited by Thomas Hobbes. The negative attributes could be linked to the view of the realist school of thought because the realist perspective is exactly what we see in the Nigerian politics in this contemporary world where leaders see getting to power as a do or die affairs which cost lot of lives and property as it were. A state like Nigeria with lot of potentials and intellectuals should have been the best in the globe in terms of politics, economy e.t.c but sadly, the populations of the power seeking leaders have truncated the dream of attaining the top in the globe.

Ultimately, for the Nigerian Politics to be better than what it is now there has to be a change of orientation for the leaders and citizens at large. This in turn means that leaders and all citizens should always put Nigeria first and what will help the country, disregarding selfish interest that we see in play by most leaders in politics. Leaders should be committed to a selfless service which they owe the country and by so doing, transcend to having development of Nigeria at heart and not their pocket as the case is presently. Nigeria has all it takes to be the best but there must be a political will by the leaders to drive the state to its rightful place among other climes in the globe. The duty has to be charged to our leaders to stop been power drunk and desperate, they should put on absolute patriotism which in turn helps in the growth and development of the country as a whole. In a nutshell, all the recommendation can only be achieved if the present constitution is destroyed and a new one is written for adoption. Only then will there been absolute patriotism, political participation, cleansed political culture, enabling environment for self-development, functional system where all parts are working for a great output, disbandment of all selfish elite group that are always power drunk and ultimately, ONE Nigeria.

## **References**

- [1] Paul, R. Viotti, Kauppi M. V. (2009) International Relations and World Politics Security, Economy, Identity 4<sup>th</sup> edition New jersey Pearson Prentice Hall.
- [2] Machiavelli, N. (1532). The Prince. Italy: Antonio Blado d' Asola.
- [3] Oladipo, O. (1991). 'The Marxist Theory of The State' in F.A. Adeigbo (Eds), Readings In Social and Political Philosophy, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed, vol, 1). Ibadan: Claverianum Press.
- [4] Anifowose R. and Enemuo F. (2015) elements of politics 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2015 Sam Iroanusi Street Bariga, Akoka Yaba, Lagos Nigeria.
- [5] Ayeni-Akeke O.A.(2008) Foundation of Political Science. Ibadan Ababa Press Limited
- [6] Johary J .C.(2012), Contemporary Political Theory: New Dimensions, Basic Concepts and Major Trends, Sterlind PublishersLtd.New Delhi
- [7] Morgenthau H. S.(1973). Power Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace 5<sup>th</sup> ed New York, Knopt
- [8] Hoffman J. and Graham P. (2009). Introduction to political theory, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. England, pearson education limited.
- [9] Johari J.C. (2012). Contemporary Political Theory: New Dimension, Basic Concept and Major Trends; Sterling Publication. Ltd. New Delhi.
- [10] Lanborn and Legold J. (2013). World Politics into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Preliminary Edition.
- [11] Mclean I. and Mcmillam A. (2003). The Concise Dictionary of Politics. Ney York, Oxford University Press
- [12] Goldstein J. and Pevehouse J. C. (2013). International politics, pearson.
- [13] D'Aneri P. (2014) International Politics: Power and Purpose in Global Affairs, Canada, Wadsworth Centage Learning 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.