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## **Enduring Legacy of Realism and the US Foreign Policy: Dynamics of Prudence, National Interest and Balance of Power**

Muhammad Nadeem Mirza\*

### **Abstract**

*The United States pursuing the realist prescription during the cold war helped maintain the balance of power and thus 'peace' among the competing great powers. In the post-cold war era it divorced some of realist assumptions – most importantly the prudential consideration – and pursued hegemonic policies which not only alienated its allies but also created apprehensions among other great powers about US ambitious grand designs. By pursuing such policies it has challenged not only the legitimacy of certain institutions established since Second World War (like United Nations), but also the institutions being established since Treaty of Westphalia (like state sovereignty). The study postulates that struggle for power and great power politics that had gone to the back-benches for some time during 1990s is very much alive and back in the post 9/11 era generally, and in the past decade specifically, establishing the prominence of enduring legacy of Realism.*

**Key Words:** Realism, US Foreign Policy, Prudence, National Interest, Hegemony, Moralism.

### **Introduction**

Political realism has often been termed as “American realism”<sup>1</sup> because realists not only helped the United States in its foreign policy formulation during the Cold War, but also justified its behavior. Realist assumptions and American foreign policy during and even after the cold war go side by side, until they got divorced and some new groups and ideologies started gaining ground on the American political landscape, most important being neo conservatism.

By 1990s, certain scholars started criticizing realism – specifically structural realism –on the basis of its failure to predict demise of the Soviet Union. Kenneth Waltz responding to critics and defending realism stated that the “theory’s ability to explain is more important than its ability to predict.”<sup>2</sup> He further narrated that “a theory does not provide an account of what has happened or of what may happen. Just as a hammer becomes a useful tool when nails and wood are available, so a theory becomes useful in devising an

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<sup>1</sup>Michael C. Desch, ‘It Is Kind to Be Cruel: The Humanity of American Realism’, *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 03, 2003, pp. 415–426.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth N. Waltz, ‘Evaluating Theories’, *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 4, December 1997, p. 916.

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explanation of events when combined with information about them.”<sup>3</sup> John A. Vasquez debating the same issues noted that “the great virtue of realism is that it can explain almost any foreign policy event. Its great defect is that it tends to do this after the fact, rather than before.”<sup>4</sup> This point of view was backed by the events of 1990s. Endemic wars raged in the decade proved that although certain great powers have gone in background, yet the capability of members of the international system to wreak havoc has increased exponentially.<sup>5</sup> Rising China, resurgence of Russia and Putin’s proactive policies to materialize his dreams of achieving a position unrivalled in the history, assertive policies of the rest i.e. BRICS; are some of the factors which point towards the fact that international system is still anarchic and great powers are still very much relevant. Besides, horizontal as well as vertical proliferation of thermonuclear weapons proves that great power struggle to outsmart each other will continue, establishing the enduring legacy of realism.

Although fall of the Soviet Union by late 1980s had brought the United States to a position unrivalled in contemporary history, yet these were the catastrophic events of 9/11 and the subsequent launch of the war on terror which gave it a chance to strengthen its position in the international political hierarchy. Since then it is using all the possible means available to assert its dominance and for achieving that end it has even challenged the norms and institutions established not only after Second World war<sup>6</sup> but also those which have been working since establishment of the Westphalian Order - the most important elements the Westphalian Order was the establishment of state system, and concept of sovereignty; the United States in the post-cold war era has challenged the both. Its behavior in the post-cold war era not only alienated its allies, but also made the world more insecure to live. A Former US Ambassador Chas Freeman once noted “the United States is a City on a Hill, but it is increasingly fogged in.”<sup>7</sup>

The United States was considered as a super-power in international system and like every power of the history; it has used its dominant position

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>John A. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 324.

<sup>5</sup> Josef Joffe noted that “Communism might disappear, but thermonuclear weapons and vast conventional force will not.” Josef Joffe, ‘Entangled Forever’, in *The Future of American Foreign Policy*, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Eugene R. Wittkopf, St. Martin’s Press, 199, p.34.

<sup>6</sup> Its actions have put the legitimacy of the international organisations like United Nations, International Criminal Court, International Court of Justice, and many others, at stake.

<sup>7</sup>Clyde V. Prestowitz, *Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism And The Failure Of Good Intentions*, Basic Books, 2003, p . 49.

to expand its 'national interest' in the world<sup>8</sup>– Joseph Nye commented in 1992 that the “United States is still the largest possessor of ‘hard’ power, the ability to command others, usually through the use of tangible resources such as military or economic might; and ‘soft’ power, the ability to co-opt rather than command, to get others to want what you want.”<sup>9</sup>In order to expand those interests, the United States needed a rationale and these were the rhetoric of promoting universal moral principles and democratic ideals at international level which has served the purpose. It has been intervened in the domestic affairs of other states and even launched wars against them on the basis of promoting democracy and protecting ‘its’ national interests. While at the same time, right application of soft power means, it has built an order where application of hard power tools has not only become acceptable, but at times desirable. Using military to promote democracy is just one such example. Finding a right balance in the application of soft and hard powers has been the fulcrum of grand strategies being pursued by great powers generally and super-powers specifically. In the absence of a challenger, this delicate balance between application of soft and hard powers often get disturbed and great power start behaving in a manner which not only threaten stability of international system, but also creates a threat perception in the lesser powers. United States’ supercilious behavior in the post-cold war era has infuriated the allies and sharpened world public opinion against its policies. One of the first examples of such a behavior was President Bush Sr.’s defining the new terms of engagement in a New World Order dominated by preponderant position of the United States.<sup>10</sup>*The New York Times*, sensing the drift, quoted then foreign minister of France Roland Dumas as, “I am telling our American friends: They must realize that being the world’s top power creates not only possibilities and rights but also duties.”<sup>11</sup> The message was clear that the age-old US allies were worried about its ambitious grand designs in the world. Jacques Delors of France, who was President of the European Community Commission, also stated on the same day, that “Washington could not take charge of the whole world.”<sup>12</sup>It seems that members of the international community were

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<sup>8</sup>Hans Morgenthau noted “super power point to an unprecedented accumulation of power in the hands of a few nations, which sets these nations not only apart from small ones but from the traditional great powers as well.” H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006, 133. Former French foreign minister Hubert Védérine popularizes the term *Hyper-power* for the United States in 1990s.

<sup>9</sup>Joseph S. Nye-Jr., ‘Against “Declinism”’, in *The Future of American Foreign Policy*, ed. Eugene R. Wittkopf and Charles W. Kegley, St. Martin’s Press, 1992, p. 342.

<sup>10</sup>George H. W. Bush, “‘Toward a New World Order’ Address Before a Joint Session of Congress’, 11 September 1990.

<sup>11</sup>Ronald Dumas, quoted in ‘Soviet Turmoil: France to U.S.: Don’t Rule’, *New York Times*, 3 September 1991.

<sup>12</sup>Jacques Delors, op. cit.

concerned about a possibility that the United States – being not having a clear adversary at the moment – will try to *rule* the world and might challenge the interests of other states.

Realists like Mearsheimer posit that in international relations “small gaps foster peace, (while) larger gaps promote wars.”<sup>13</sup> The power gap between the United States and the second great power in sight is huge. This can be one of the main reasons behind aggressive behavior of the United States towards other great powers in the post-cold war era. There was a perception in 1990s that no other single state or a coalition of states is going to balance its power in the near future. Kenneth Waltz had warned in 1991 that “in international politics, unbalanced power constitutes a danger even when it is American power that is out of balance.”<sup>14</sup> This unbalanced power leads to an imbalance in the application of hard and soft powers in the international arena, thus further generating apprehensions among friends and foes alike. Events since 1990, prove that although there exists a relative peace among great powers’ relations, yet the foundations of this peace are very shaky and resultantly the world has become a more dangerous place to live than it was during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Realism as a theory of International Relations is predisposed to not only address the rhetoric but also endeavors to explain the motivations behind state policies.<sup>15</sup> This study endeavors to explain US foreign policy in the post-cold war era, while taking stock of differing realist assumptions, and policy prescriptions.

### **Theory and Practice: Realist Insights of US Foreign Policy**

Loch Johnson notes, “the Soviet Union and the United States were like two scorpions in a jar: if one stung, the other would return the favor. Both would die.”<sup>16</sup> Different scholars ascribed different names to this sort of situation with slight variations – deterrence, bipolar balance of power, Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), balance of terror, and the like. Realists consider that cold war was the most stable international system because of the existence of this perilous situation. They offered the United States with certain set of policies, pursuing which it did not only help preserve peace with the Soviet Union, but also helped in promotion of the US national

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<sup>13</sup>John J. Mearsheimer, ‘Why We Will Soon Miss The Cold War’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1990, <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/politics/foreign/mearsh.htm>.

<sup>14</sup>Kenneth N. Waltz, ‘America as a Model for the World? A Foreign Policy Perspective’, *PS: Political Science and Politics* 24, no. 4, 1991, p.: 670.

<sup>15</sup>Kenneth W. Thompson & W. David Clinton, ‘Foreword’, in *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, ed. H.J. Morgenthau, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006, , xxiii.

<sup>16</sup>Loch K. Johnson, *Seven Sins of American Foreign Policy* (Longman Publishing Group, 2007, p . 134.

interest at global level. Dunne and Schmidt even noted that the realists' prescriptions helped the United States in "its rise to become the global hegemon."<sup>17</sup> Ikenberry states that realist foreign policy as adopted by the US during the cold war was "organized around containment, deterrence, and the maintenance of the global balance of power."<sup>18</sup> Containment as the set of policies was enunciated by the United States during late 1940s in response to Soviet behavior in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. George F. Kennan advised that the ideological predispositions of the Soviet Union are contrary to that of the United States. Soviet ideology is based upon the concept of expansionism. Soviets would do all they could to "weaken power and influence of Western powers." He noted that although the Soviet Union was "impervious to logic of reason ... but it is highly sensitive to logic of force." And it would restraint itself "when strong resistance is encountered at any point." He concluded that the United States and its allies would have to offer that resistance.<sup>19</sup>

US policy of containment of the Soviet Union was further strengthened with its nuclear testing in 1949. Although the US was pursuing such a policy, Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 ensured that deterrence existed between the two.<sup>20</sup> Since then, till the end of the cold war, the US and the Soviet Union followed the prudential policies as are enunciated by realism, and avoided direct confrontation with each other. Competitive co-existence, détente and the US opening up with China based upon the linkage theory of Henry Kissinger are the epitome of such prudential policies.

Another rationale behind the success of realism as are dominant theoretical perspective in the study of international relations during cold war was its focus on the conflict and competition among the states. As war remains one of the most important expressions of glory, conflict and competition, so the realist explanation of enhancement and application of military capabilities to achieve the balance of power remained a dominant strand during the cold war.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Tim Dunne & Brian C. Schmidt, 'Realism', in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis and Steve Smith, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 162.

<sup>18</sup>G. John Ikenberry, 'America's Imperial Ambition', *Foreign Affairs*, no. September/October, 2002, p.45.

<sup>19</sup>George F. Kennan, 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct', *Foreign Affairs*, no. 25, 1947, pp. 566–82.

<sup>20</sup>Benjamin Schwarz, 'The Real Cuban Missile Crisis', *The Atlantic*, February 2013.

<sup>21</sup>Joseph S. Nye-Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, Basic Books, 1990, p. 177. Actions by one great power were reciprocated by the other in order to maintain the rough balance in the international system.

### **The United States and Soviet Union: Billiard Balls of the Cold War**

Structural realists believe that states are primary and unitary actors in international relation and that states are 'like units'. Ideological positions that states hold and promote are the tools in their hands for pursuing national self-interest. By end of the First World War (and in the mid-par period),<sup>22</sup> both the United States and Soviet Union had developed state ideologies utilizing which they could intervene anywhere in the world: "interventionist liberalism in the one country, international communism in the other."<sup>23</sup> Both the great powers thus made effective and 'selective' utilization of these ideological tools to expand their influence and interest in the world.

Alongside the ideological orientations, the two great powers occupied almost similar positions and dispositions, in the post-Second World War structure of the international system. As their power positions and ideological objectives were somewhat similar, so their external behavior exhibited astounding similarities. Kenneth Waltz devised two criteria to compare the policies of great powers – interventions abroad and the armament policies. By comparing behavior of the United States and Soviet Union on the basis of these criteria, he found that most of the actions taken by one party are immediately reciprocated by the other<sup>24</sup> – whether the actions involved increasing the military budgets, quantitative or qualitative increase in nuclear stockpiles, developing space weaponization, or supporting secessionist and irredentist movement across the world. The case of interventions abroad can be taken as a case study to analyze such behavior of great powers: the general discourse that was developed by/in the western world revolve around the precept that Soviet Union used to have an expansionist policy throughout the cold war – so naturally it should have intervened abroad more often as compared to the US. Contrarily, a study conducted in 1976 found that in about 30 years since the end of the Second World War, the United States used military means in one way or other to enhance its national interest and intervene in affairs of other states, almost twice the number of the Soviet interventions.<sup>25</sup> It depicts, realists claim, that both the Soviet Union and United States exhibited similar behavior during the cold war i.e. both intervened militarily in the affairs of other states on the basis of protecting their national interest and to promote their respective

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<sup>22</sup> Morgenthau termed the World War I and World War II as "two instalments of the same world war." Hans Morgenthau, 'The Political Science of E. H. Carr', *World Politics* 1, no. 01, 1948, p. 132.

<sup>23</sup>Waltz, 'America as a Model for the World?', p. 668.

<sup>24</sup>Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics', *International Security* 18, no. 2, October 1993, pp. 45–46.

<sup>25</sup>Barry M. Blechman & Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, Brookings Institution, 1978.

ideologies - or in the words of Arnold Wolfers they were just like two billiard balls on the board of international system.<sup>26</sup> Neoclassical Realists, on the other hand challenge this assertion of states being like units, and claim that states are organized in the structure of international system which puts continuous systemic pressure on them. They introduced certain 'intervening variables' between the systemic pressures, and states' foreign policy such as ideology of state, leadership and its perception, its history, culture and many other variable lying at the domestic level of state structure. These variables affect the foreign policy behavior of states thus implying that the states are 'not like units'.<sup>27</sup> They claim that realism failed to predict the demise of Soviet Union, because it did not give due importance to these intervening variables.

### **Tamed' National Self-Interest: Prudential Consideration**

Second realist assumption in congruence with the behavior of United States is the pursuance of national self-interest and the principle of the self-help. "Realism taught American leaders to focus on interests rather than ideology, to seek peace through strength, and to recognize that great powers can coexist even if they have antithetical values and beliefs."<sup>28</sup> In the anarchical structure of international system these are the states themselves which would have to cater for their interest; the role of supra-state institutions in this regard is at best negligible. It does not imply that such institutions do not exist. Realists claim that these institutions serve, in fact, interests of the great powers.

The important thing to note is that realists left the 'definition' of national self-interest to the states. Joseph Nye criticized realists as, "they tend to take national interest for granted ... how states define their national interests and how those interests change have always been weak areas in the realist approach."<sup>29</sup> Contrary to Nye's point of view, defining the national

<sup>26</sup>Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962.

<sup>27</sup>Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Gideon Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy', *World Politics* 51, no. 01 (1998): 144-72; Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Randall L. Schweller, 'The Progressive Power of Neoclassical Realism', in *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, ed. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>28</sup>Tim Dunne & Brian C. Schmidt, op.cit. p. 162.

<sup>29</sup>Nye-Jr., *Bound to Lead*, op cit. p. 177.



interest in accordance to the state policies made it possible for the United States to pursue objectives which were according to 'its' definition.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, realists do not squarely say that states should follow their national interests blindly, while neglecting or trampling the interests of other states. For them pursuing 'tamed national interest' helps great powers to strengthen their positions in international system. The United States behaved during the cold war in accordance to this principle, resultantly world looked towards it as a 'beacon of light and of the democracy'.

Prudential consideration should act as the most important constraint on the behavior of states' policies. This implies that pursuance of national interest in accordance to the states' policies be done in such a manner that the interests of other states may also be taken into consideration. When every state is pursuing its national self-interest, there are little chances of their converging with each other –and the chances of divergence and even clash of interest do exist. In such situation a prudential analysis is usually done<sup>31</sup> so as to find a consensus among the actors that satisfies the 'limited' interests of all parties involved. In the post-cold war era generally and post-9/11 era specifically, the United States has avoided pursuing this realist assumption and used force in certain areas where diplomatic solutions could have helped resolve the issues. It has pursued policies in the name of the national self-interest which not only alienated its allies but also has raised the possibility of counter-balancing by other great powers – in short its own policies has challenged its predominant position in the international system. There has been a big debate in the academic circles about the United States being pursuing an imperialist foreign policy and its grand designs being hegemonistic at best.<sup>32</sup> Offensive realism tries to grapple this behavior of the United States while noting that it is pursuing such policies in order to ensure its 'survival' in the anarchic structure of international system. For the offensive realists, there are no status-quo great powers in international system. Every great power is in a constant struggle to shift the balance of power in its favor. Those powers in fact try to ensure their 'survival' and the best way of ensuring it, is to become the 'hegemon' of system - thus for them

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<sup>30</sup>Gilpin in an interview explain the changing nature of the American national interest from George Washington to the present era. See Robert Gilpin, 'Conversations in International Relations: Interview with Robert Gilpin', *International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2005): 363–65.

<sup>31</sup>Alex J. Bellamy, 'Is the War on Terror Just?', *International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2005): 276.

<sup>32</sup>John Munro mentioned that "the century-plus of thinking ... draws our attention to how US empire pervades the nation while it is propelled beyond its borders; how it requires conquered territory from which to stage new invasions; how it creates spaces of privilege and areas of confinement and misery; and how it is driven by economics but also determined by culture, racism, sexuality and patriarchy." John Munro, 'Empire and Intersectionality. Notes on the Production of Knowledge about US Imperialism', *Globality Studies Journal: Global History, Society, Civilization*, no. 12 (November 2008): 17.

the states are the power maximizers.<sup>33</sup> But power should be maximized in order to avoid the counter-balancing coalitions. Morgenthau had also explained this behavior of the states and termed that man's dearth of power ceased only, either with the death or when every other man becomes his subject i.e. he becomes a god.<sup>34</sup> Defensive realists like Kenneth Waltz contradicts to Mearsheimer's point of view and consider great powers to be 'status quo powers' which are in a constant struggle to maintain the balance of power in international system – thus for them the states are security-maximizers.<sup>35</sup> While explaining the behavior of states in different manner, most of the realists prescribe and agree on the point that the states should pursue the prudential policies in order to avoid the great powers wars.

Generally realists claim that a shift in the structure of the international system cannot be achieved without threatening the interests of other powers, which resist such attempts and consequently the chances of great power wars increase. Making certain of the prudential consideration these powers thus avoid pursuing hegemonistic policies. The United States in the post-cold war era, it seems, has parted company from realism on this issue and pursued policies which has threatened the interests of other great powers – even if those are allies of the US.

Examples are the realists' opposition to Vietnam War during 1960s and again their opposition to Iraq War in 2003. Thirty three different university professors – most of them realists – published an open letter to President Bush on September 26, 2002 stating "military force should be used only when it advances U.S. national interests. War with Iraq does not meet this standard."<sup>36</sup> Later they published another open letter in 2004, this time signed by about 850 IR scholars stating that "We judge that the current American policy centered on war in Iraq is the most misguided one since the Vietnam period."<sup>37</sup> Hence the general perception that realists are warmongers is hardly true. They do not reject the idea of use of military force for attaining the objectives defined by state's national interest, instead focusing upon military use after a thorough prudential consideration.

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<sup>33</sup>John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001, pp. 3–4.

<sup>34</sup>Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*.

<sup>35</sup>Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979.

<sup>36</sup>Robert J. Art, 'War with Iraq Is NOT in America's National Interest: Open Letter to President Bush and American Public', *New York Times*, 26 September 2002.

<sup>37</sup>'An Open Letter to the American People: 850 IR Scholars Signed Open Letter against Iraq War and US Policy towards Iraq', *Sensible Foreign Policy*, October 2004, <https://www.sensibleforeignpolicy.net/an-open-letter-to-the-american-people/>. Also see Daniel W. Drezner, 'IR Scholars Weigh in against Iraq: 850 IR Scholars Signed Open Letter against Iraq War and US Policy towards Iraq', *Foreign Policy*, 12 October 2004, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2004/10/12/ir-scholars-weigh-in-against-iraq/>.

### **The Paradoxical Choice between Morality and Politics**

Morgenthau criticized four historical trends in the US foreign policy behavior: “legalism, utopianism, sentimentalism and isolationism.”<sup>38</sup> First three trends can be combined into one word moralism. These trends emerged because of peculiar geographic feature of the United States which gave it a chance to pursue isolationist policy and to avoid entanglement in European balance of power politics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the post-Second World War era, it could not remain isolated. So, realists claim that while leaving the isolationist tendency it should also leave the moralistic approach in its foreign policy behavior. They hold view that morality is a tool available to states for pursuing other objectives defined by national interest. Throughout the history, debate raged among academics and practitioners arguing that whether *morality serves the politics* or *politics serves the morality*. Realists support the former view that it is morality which is subservient to politics. It is a similar notion which was pursued by Athenians against Melos. “Melians were forced to submit to the realist iron law that the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”<sup>39</sup> Language of the doctrines attached to different presidents and other practitioners of the United States in history is littered with moralistic goals and assumptions. Whether it is George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt, Truman, Reagan, Bush Sr., Clinton, Bush Jr. or Obama, every president has used the universal moral principles to expand the ‘veiled self-interest’ of the United States, as prescribed by the realists. Josef Joffe points out that “American foreign policy since 1945 has followed interests rather than ideology, and so the former will outlive the latter.”<sup>40</sup> During the cold war the Soviet Union tried to expand its interests wrapped in the communist ideology, while the United States tried to expand its interests wrapped in its ideology i.e. democracy promotion and the pursuing the universal moral principles at the international stage.<sup>41</sup> So moralism, mostly, has remained a tool in the statecraft of great powers.

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<sup>38</sup>Hans J. Morgenthau quoted by Martin Griffiths, *Fifty Key Thinkers in International Relations*, Routledge Key Guides, London: Routledge, 2001, “While some other scholars highlight three traditions of American foreign policy: “pragmatism, moralism, and isolationism”.

<sup>39</sup>Thucydides, ‘Melian Dialogue: Sixteenth Year of the War - The Melian Conference - Fate of Melos’, in *History of the Peloponnesian War: 431 BC*, trans. William Smith, Philadelphia: Thomas Wardle, 1840.

<sup>40</sup>Joffe, ‘Entangled Forever’, op. cit, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup>Waltz, ‘The Emerging Structure of International Politics, op. cit.p. 48.

### Hegemonic Policies and Challenge to Balance of Power

Almost every realist thought converge on the issue of stability offered by balance of the power system in international politics. They are of the view that to preserve balance of power in the system, states will align themselves so as to ensure that no one power attains a preponderant position in international system.<sup>42</sup> Van Evera hypnotized that “war is far more likely when the conquest is easy,”<sup>43</sup> that is when the balance of power is disturbed. For the classical and neo realists, states try to preserve existing balance of power structure and resist its transformation. But the offensive realists believe that in the structure of the international system there always exist revisionist states.<sup>44</sup> Prominent offensive realist Mearsheimer maintains that “all great powers have revisionist aims.”<sup>45</sup> Napoleon’s France, Wilhelm’s and Hitler’s Germany and post-cold war United States are few of the examples of revisionist powers in the recent history. The United States, whenever found chance, tried to infringe in the Eastern bloc, so did the Soviet Union. “Advances made by one were quickly followed by the other.”<sup>46</sup> But the constant feature of their foreign policy behavior during the cold war remained the existence of certain red-lines which both avoided crossing.

Bipolar cold war era is considered as the longest peace in recent history because the world did not see any *direct* great powers’ war – though there have been instances when great powers came in direct confrontation with each other, for example the US and China in Korean War, The US and Soviet Union in 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. But they managed these crises, so as to avoid another great power war. Realists postulate that chances of great power wars are higher in multipolar systems as compared to bipolar systems – examples are continuous great power wars during the nineteenth-century and the world wars of the twentieth-century.<sup>47</sup> Multipolar systems having a potential hegemon – a great power having enough capacity to affect other great powers’ interests and extract benefits – are especially prone to wars.<sup>48</sup> Rise of Germany as a potential hegemon in the start and the mid-

<sup>42</sup>Nye-Jr., *Bound to Lead*, op. cit. p.35.

<sup>43</sup>Stephen van Evera, ‘Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War’, *International Security*, 22, no. 4, April 1998, pp. 5–6,

<sup>44</sup>Randall L. Schweller, ‘Neorealism’s Status quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?’, *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (1 March 1996): 91, doi:10.1080/09636419608429277.

<sup>45</sup>Brian C. Schmidt, ‘Competing Realist Conceptions of Power’, *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (6 January 2005): 541.

<sup>46</sup>Waltz, ‘America as a Model for the World?’ op. cit. p. 667.

<sup>47</sup>Coetzee called twentieth century as “Satan’s century”, because of the extent of the death and war this century brought on the humanity. J. M. Coetzee quoted by Jutta Brunnée and Stephen J. Toope, ‘Slouching Towards New “Just” Wars: The Hegemon after September 11th’, *International Relations* 18, no. 4, 12 January 2004, p. 406.

<sup>48</sup>Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, op. cit. .

twentieth century and fears it created in other great powers strategic calculations resulted in two world wars.<sup>49</sup>Mearsheimer notes, “the reasons for the first and second world wars were: multipolar distribution of power in Europe, and the imbalances of strength that often developed among the great powers as they jostled for supremacy or advantage. Deductively, a bipolar system is more peaceful for simple reason that under it only two major powers are in contention.”<sup>50</sup>Established belief in the 1980s US Republican administration was that we need not *only* contain Soviet Union, we can defeat it. Fall of Soviet Union strengthened the belief in the American mindset that they are a superior and exceptional nation and it is not the United States which is supposed to tame its national interest, these are the other states which are supposed to realign their interests to those of the US.

Relative ‘peaceful’ ending of the cold war changed the structure of international political system but it did not change the rules of the game. The United States occupied the dominant position of this structure and it was expected that its behavior would be based on the prudential policies with the ultimate objective of minimizing other powers’ fears about American intentions. By adopting such policies it would have preserved its predominant position in this structure. On the contrary its aggressive behavior has resulted in increasing isolation of the United States in the circle of great powers and proved that it is pursuing revisionist policies.

## **Conclusion**

By the early 1990s debate started in the US to formulate its new role in a transformed international political structure. Krauthammer argued that it is a unipolar moment, in which “the centre of world power is the unchallenged superpower, the United States.”<sup>51</sup>Some scholars argued that the US should go

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<sup>49</sup> In the nineteenth century, when many people were optimistic in their views of human nature, and confident that the course of progress was going to be continued into an indefinite future, there were a few scholars who feared and foretold that the twentieth century would see great wars of peoples, popular military dictatorships and the harnessing of the machines of industry to the science of warfare. Herbert Butterfield, ‘The Tragic Element in Modern International Conflict’, *The Review of Politics* 12, no. 02, April 1950, 147.

<sup>50</sup>Mearsheimer, ‘Why We Will Soon Miss The Cold War’, op. cit, 49.

<sup>51</sup> Charles Krauthammer stated that “the immediate post-cold war world is not multipolar. It is unipolar. The centre of world power is the unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies. Second, the internationalist consensus is under renewed assault. The assault this time comes not only from the usual pockets of post-Vietnam liberal isolationism (e.g., the churches) but from a resurgence of 1930s-style conservative isolationism. And third, the emergence of a new strategic environment, marked by the rise of small aggressive states armed with weapons of mass destruction and possessing the means to deliver them (what might be called Weapon States), makes the coming decades a

back to hibernation i.e. to isolationism. John Lewis Gaddis argued against this point of view and noted that “it would be foolish to claim, though, that the United States after 1991 can return to the role it played in world affairs before 1941. For as the history of the 1930s suggests the absence of imminent threat is no guarantee that threats do not exist.”<sup>52</sup> President Bush Sr. soon defined a position the United States will hold in future in the world. In this new world order, the US will put in every effort to ensure that no other great power comes in equality to that of the United States. Defense Planning Guide of 1992, leaked to the press, clearly suggested that the United States should ensure that no other great power should rise to challenge its predominant position in the international system. And the US should ensure to keep a check on such possible competitors.<sup>53</sup> This created resentment in other great powers. Deductively Stephen Walt claimed that “the end of the cold war did not bring the end of power politics, and (thus) realism is likely to remain the single most useful instrument in our intellectual toolbox.”<sup>54</sup>

Great power rivalries were delegated to the back-benches for some time in the 1990s but they did not disappear. There still exists a fear in most of the European states that a Germany unchecked by the American power will pose a threat to their security.<sup>55</sup> Although Japan has been pacified over past half century but fear still exists that a reinvigorated and re-militarized Japan will pose a grave threat to Asia. China is rising and asserting itself, and demanding a rightful place in the structure of international system.<sup>56</sup> If denied, the possibility of a clash of interest between China and other great powers exists. The exchange of harsh words and the diplomatic and strategic maneuvering between China and Japan is just a reminder that great power rivalries have not gone forever. Possibility of a conflict between the United States and China over South China Sea cannot be ruled out. Russia is re-asserting itself and claiming its lost glory under President Putin. Russian invasion of Crimea, its interference in the Syrian crisis and other

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time of heightened, not diminished, threat of war. Charles Krauthammer, ‘The Unipolar Moment’, *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1, 1990, p. 23.

<sup>52</sup>John Lewis Gaddis, ‘Towards the Post Cold War World’, in *The Future of American Foreign Policy*, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Eugene R. Wittkopf (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1992), 16.

<sup>53</sup>Paul Wolfowitz, ‘Memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments: FY 94-99 Defense Planning Guidance (DPG)’ (Department of Defense, 18 February 1992). Paul Wolfowitz, ‘Excerpts From 1992 Draft “Defense Planning Guidance (DPG)”’, FRONTLINE, The War Behind Closed Doors (PBS, 1992), <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/iraq/etc/wolf.html>.

<sup>54</sup>Stephen M. Walt, ‘International Relations: One World, Many Theories’, *Foreign Policy*, no. 110, Spring 1998, p. 43.

<sup>55</sup>Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, op. cit p. 2.

<sup>56</sup>Muhammad Nadeem Mirza, ‘Contending Interests of Big Powers in Central Asia: China’s Perspective’ (Regional Security and Foreign Policy in South, Central and West Asia, Islamabad: Strategic Vision Institute-SVI, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung-KAS, 2017).

international conflicts, and its struggle to protect and expand its area of influence in the Eurasian region depict the possibility of having a confrontation with other great powers in the system. These are some of a long list of facts which illustrate that great power struggle is not over. Hence realism is still relevant, as a theory of international relations, as it was during or before of the cold war. Another point worth mentioning is that “in Asia many cleavages have nothing to do with the Cold War.”<sup>57</sup> Sino-India rivalry, Indo-Pak problems, China-Taiwan issue, China-Japan troubles are few of the many examples which had little to do with cold war politics. Cold war did affect the dynamics of these conflicts, but these conflicts remain perennial and pose a serious threat not only to the region but also to the international security. A specific example is Pakistan-India conflict over the issue of Kashmir which has nothing to do with the cold war great power politics, but was affected by the contours of international politics and geopolitical setting of the region and of the world.

In the post-9/11 era President Bush Jr. repeated the same mistake and launched unnecessary wars<sup>58</sup> which have not only damaged the US economy and military, but also affected its much-hyped soft power and standing in the international system. Although President Obama promised that he will bring back the ‘lost’ glory, yet he mostly pursued the same policies as of his predecessor and expanded the military presence of the US in world. Since the election of President Trump, great power struggle is back in full swing. His policies has not only alienated and infuriated its allies – US withdrawal from Iran nuclear deal, Paris agreement, UN Human Rights Council, Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty (INF) – but has also proved detrimental to its position in the international system. Trade war with China is theme of the day. By moving away from certain realist assumptions the United States had sown the seeds of discord with other great powers – who are wary of the US objectives behind its recent actions – and now is facing a blowback of its policies. Great power struggle is back, hence establishing the enduring legacy of realism.

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<sup>57</sup>Nye-Jr., *Bound to Lead*, xiv.

<sup>58</sup>John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, ‘An Unnecessary War’, *Foreign Policy*, February 2003.