

**Political Theory & the Treaty of Westphalia**

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Up to this point current international political theories have not been able to accurately describe international political relations due to their flawed foundation in the westphalian model. Political development is a process that arises from a need for societies to interact with each other. As people have evolved and populations have increased, the need for a large scale and all encompassing political system has surfaced. In order for people on an individual level and nation states on an international level to effectively manage economic and social affairs some sort of system(s) must be instituted to maintain order between all acting participants. Up to this point many variations of systems have been implemented within individual nation states, and recently a few institutions are attempting to manage the global society as a whole on an international level. As we move forward into a future of a more globalized society we are becoming increasingly aware of the need to better understand our current international political processes so that we may find a more suitable way of managing and connecting people on both the individual and international levels. The history of political development and current international political theories hold important evidence that show failings due to the westphalian foundation.

Every nation state has its own set of ideologies and expresses them in actions they put forth within the international political arena. These interactions throughout history have had both negative and positive connotations. In their extremes these interactions have been a catalyst for war, but commonly hold lesser consequences. There seems to be an overall desire within the majority of societies for progress, but with limited resources and contradicting objectives nation states with even the most positive of

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intentions commonly come to a point of opposition. As societies have grown larger and our world smaller, nation states have progressively become more aware of the political and economical framework that supports each society. Because of the immense variation in world views, world leaders throughout history have attempted to put agreements into place that would enable nation states to interact in an autonomous way thus protecting the sovereignty of all acting members.

The first recorded agreement in history that intended to ensure the sovereignty of nation states was the Treaty of Westphalia. This treaty was signed in 1648 and ended both the thirty years war within the Holy Roman Empire as well as the eighty years war between Spain and the Dutch Republic. This event is remembered as the birth of the international political system. For the first time in history nation states were recognized as autonomous actors within their corresponding territories and therefore were perceived as sovereign nations. Although on a global level so called anarchy still existed, nations had consciously decided to recognize each other in this way with an optimistic perspective. The two key features of a Westphalian state are that nation states are territorially independent and autonomous (Krasner, 1995). Within each nation state exists a government that has the ultimate authority over the affairs and actions of its members. The Westphalian model states that under this agreement no outside government or person(s) can interfere with another nation state within its borders. The political authority within each nation state defines its existence geographically over a specified territory rather than over a culture or religion. The idea of autonomy was created so that no outside parties would have any authority within a

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nation state's internal affairs. This optimistic idea of a world where all nation states would just leave each other to their own devices never worked out as planned. From its inception, the Treaty of Westphalia, nation states have been acting against its code. Since no higher level of authority was established to oversee the actions of individual nation states, they all consistently violated the agreements of the treaty. When considering the logic behind each nation states action it becomes clear that the treaty of Westphalia is flawed in its ability to comprise all nations within a realistic system. This treaty did not take into consideration the ebb and flow of political and economic shifts over time both within nation states as well as between them. There are a number of contradictions occurring within the treaty itself.

*"1) That the power of the state is unlimited within its own territory but limited within the international system.*

*2) That all states are equal.*

*3) That both the state and the people are sovereign (Farmanfarmaian, 2008)."*

By taking something as simple as global resources into account, power can never be confined neatly into little packets called nation states and kept separately stacked like jars on a shelf. Because human civilization exists on a planet that is interconnected, and we all utilize different parts of this planet for survival, then it follows that nation states will at times need to interact with each other in terms of exchange. Since there will always be a flow of resources through nation states, power will also be exchanged, as a states power is proportional to its influence on the international system. In this sense all states can never be assumed to be equal. A state cannot have 'unlimited

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power' within itself when it exists within a system that restricts its power. If all states were equal then the power of each state could be viewed as unlimited within its own territory, but when we include resources into the power equation we can see that states are unequal and thus the amount of power that each state can have within its own territory is limited by its ability to access or acquire resources. This shows that a nation's level of sovereignty is proportional to their influence on the international community.

As can be seen the Westphalian model was never in a position to be feasibly used as an instruction manual for the interactions between nation states, but rather as a starting point and no more. "The Westphalian model has never been more than a reference point or a convention; it has never been some deeply confining structure from which actors could not escape (Krasner, 1995, p.1)." As would be expected with such a flawed contract, nation states have been consistently violating the Treaty of Westphalia in four ways: through conventions, contracting, coercion, and imposition.

These four categories of violations of the Westphalian model occur because of the contradictions present within the model itself. Nations still need to do what is best for them even if it may not be best for their neighbors. Conventions between nation states generally result in agreements or treaties where rulers expect to gain but are not dependent on the actions of others. Conditionality is generally a precursor to contracting, that usually present itself in the form of an international loan. Here a nation state gives up sovereignty by allowing another to have a say in its economic affairs.

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Coercion is a form of manipulation in which sometimes results in success where a more powerful state will threaten a weaker state and this interaction will make the strong grow stronger and the weak grow weaker. Imposition is an extreme form of coercion generally manifested as a physical invasion where the other country has no choice but to go along with it, and the result here will follow suit to that of coercion.

One of the more difficult things for newly developing nation states to accomplish is the achievement of being identified as a nation state itself. In order to be recognized by other dominant political players in the world you must be considered a legitimate state. This is no easy task, and many times the ability to be recognized as legitimate has nothing to do with ethics, but rather whether or not the act of recognizing the newly formed nation state will be beneficial for the other nation states as well. For the most part this process is based upon a power play where newly formed nation state will have to trade something in order to gain independence and recognition from other world leaders. This is usually viewed as a form of contraction or imposition depending on the way you look at it (Krasner, 1995, p.117).

Current international political theories sit on top of this inconsistent and unrealistic idea of the way that nation states should interact with each other. There is no generalized agreement among political scholars that one international political theory dominates over the others. All of them generally incur parallel levels of scrutiny, and they also tend to cycle in popularity over time depending on the political landscape of the world. It is interesting to note that the root structure of international political relations

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originates from the Treaty of Westphalia, and yet not many people seem to question why our current international political theories seem so disconnected and indeterminate. This idea is exemplified within the philosophical theory of foundationalism that states that any belief within a system can only be justified if the basic root belief structures are also justified.

Within the last one hundred years a number of international political institutions have been formed as a means to bridge the gap between the current state of anarchy and all participating nation states. Anarchy defined as the absence of any centralized government has been the overall international political landscape of the world as far back as we can remember. As the world has recently become more 'globalized' there has been a growing need for some sort of international political stabilization. As a result a number of international institutions have manifested in two forms. We now have a number of INGO's (International nongovernmental organizations) which include a substantial number of non-profit organizations and a corporations. There are also a handful of IGO's (intergovernmental organizations) including; the United Nations (UN), Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe (CoE), European Union (EU) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). These organizations have all played a role in intertwining the political and economic affairs of nation states around the globe. As international players these types of organizations consistently encroach on the concept of sovereignty. One thing to point out here in the analysis of international organizations is that even though there are currently a number of extremely economically and politically powerful IGO's sitting on a level above that of

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the nation state we will still be existing within an anarchic international political landscape until the formation of one centralized governmental authority takes precedence over all nation states as well as all international political organizations (Wikipedia).

As INGO's and IGO's started popping up over time so did the process of modernization. Modernization was started as a result of a need for the U.S. to take interest in the developing nation states around the world during the 1950's. U.S leaders began to recognize the trend toward a more globalized international society and thus realized that it was in their best interest to establish power in as many geographic locations as possible. Modernization has since been instituted in a number of developing countries and is generally viewed as a result of industrialization. In its simplest form modernization can be viewed as dualistic with the traditional on one side and the modern on the other (Martinussen, 1997, p.167). The initial concept was introduced and developed in the U.S and led by Gabriel Almond, and Lucien Pye. At the start it was labeled as Classical Political Modernization Theory, and was seen by many as wishful thinking. The problems with this theory were apparent as it was assumed that the so called western industrialized societies had it right. All nation states that were to undergo the modernization process would be forced to relinquish all of their current practices, even if that meant breaking down systems of underlying religious beliefs or the loss of ethnic identities. Once this process was initiated a modern bureaucracy would replace what was there and institute things like democratic elections, newly formed political parties, and westernized education and legal systems.

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This is an extreme example of a process the U.S. consciously institute that consistently violates the Treaty of Westphalia. The process of modernization is an obvious case of dominant countries acting from a place of power that allows for strategic positioning economically and politically. The U.S. has been doing this for a long time all over the world and the most current and apparent example is the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Over time classical political modernization theory has attempted to adopt things like historical and ethnic perspectives, the role of religion in politics, nationalism, and modified forms of democracy. Although world leaders have attempted to take progressive steps in making these processes more amenable to nation states that come from opposing ideologies, the more alarming concern is that world leaders feel justified in forcing entire nation states to adopt a way of life that commonly break the foundations of their nationalistic and individual identities.

Although the Treaty of Westphalia failed to instill any determinant actions or inactions within nation states it did do one very important thing. This contract created an opening for nation states to have a new kind of conversation with each other, one where agreements could be made and power could be exchanged in a logical and rational way. This type of high level interaction was an evolutionary step for human relations, and although flawed, it did empower world leaders to make educated decisions rather than emotional ones. As international relations continued to develop over the years and countries became more and more dependent on each other's actions, academics began to take an interest in the way that this process worked. Over

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the years a handful of prominent international political theories have developed, but out of those theories not one of them is considered to be all inclusive and accepted as an authority. The way in which these theories tend to be viewed is reflective of the cultural predispositions and social climate of the population that perceives them. These views also tend to change with time. As we have seen within the U.S over the years, there has been a yoyo effect between the popular majority preferring the theories of realism or liberalism. The general consensus is always affected by the most recent developments in international political affairs.

The cause of war has also been an issue for international relations. Most countries throughout history have felt that they were going to war as a defensive move and generally not the offensive; the question then stands if both countries perceive themselves as acting defensively then who is responsible for the wars that have been caused in the first place? This has been a difficulty of developing legitimate international political theories as there are usually too many angles to consolidate into one unified manner. Generally political analysts subscribe to three political perspectives: explanatory theories, normative or prescriptive theories, and interpretive theories. Explanatory theories explain the why, normative theories describe what our attitudes should be regarding the topic, and interpretive theories give meaning to events (Brown, 1999, p.11). The application of all three approaches to the same political question will result in three very different political theories. The important thing to keep in mind is that an international political theory is never deemed conclusive, it is judged more or

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less by its ability to answer questions inclusive of as many angles as it can while still properly justifying its claim.

One of the first highly acclaimed international political theories to take root was liberal internationalism, this train of thought erupted as a response to the horror of WWI. During this time the majority of people, especially in the more westernized nations, could not understand how something of this magnitude could have occurred. What could cause governments and large populations of people to waste so much time and so many resources? The answer came in the form of liberal institutionalism in two parts. The first part assumes that if all nation states were comprised of liberal and democratic constitutional regimes there would be no war because the people would not want war. The second component points out that peace was not feasible in the old sense of anarchy and the way that political relations were conducted. What came out of this philosophy was the birth of the League of Nations. This organization was supposed to revolutionize the way that the world conducted its international affairs, and provide security to all nation states included in the League. The optimistic consensus here was that peace would be achieved because all countries participating would protect each other and law would become the replacement for war. The expectations set by liberal institutionalists did not work out as expected.

During the 1930's things at least seemed like they were headed in a more peace driven direction but the unexpected economic collapse brought it to a halt and a new perspective on international politics was needed. The league of nations were ill

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equipped to handle the growing developments and war driven tendencies in the rest of the world and in the process ended up having to do exactly the opposite of what they set out to do. A full out world war broke out. The problem with international institutionalism was that their assumptions were just plain wrong; “The League’s cumbersome procedures would act as a brake to prevent a nation that had, as it were, temporarily taken leave of its senses from acting rashly - international disputes would be solved peacefully because that was what people wanted. The behavior of Hitler and Mussolini made it clear that, in this context at least, these ideas were simply wrong (Brown, 1999, p.27).” So from this a new wave of thinking emerged, realism. Realism, hence its name, is a theory that deals with the world in hard facts. It takes into account the supposed realistic perspective keeping both the good and the bad in mind when making claim on any events. It was about 1945 when realism was considered the dominant international political theory. Realism is also considered the more dominant of international political theory although it is not said that this theory can discount the others, just that it generally better describes the reasons behind why nation states behave the way they do than others. This is mainly because this realistic perspective has no expectations and passes no judgment it just tells the story as it is. Since 1945 realism has generally been viewed as the dominant international political theory to date.

There are two categories of political theories the ‘positivist/rationalist’ and ‘post-positivist/reflectivist’ both realism and liberalism fall under the positivist category. Positivist/rationalist theories are of the school of thought that the uses more of a scientific method approach and focuses on the analysis of state. The post-

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positivist/reflectivist approach centers around things like security, class, and gender (wiki, 2011). Realism the most popular theory initially came about as a response to idealist thinking during times of war. There are three main points within the realist framework; statism, survival, and self help. Statism basically says that nation states are the only players in the game of international politics. As the status of the world on an international level is anarchy, the realist idea of survival is that nation states will act out of self interest to ensure their survival not making emotional decisions only strategic ones. A realist would also say that the success of their state can never be viewed as dependent on the assistance of another nation state.

Realism makes two very large assumptions one is that states are individuals, they are not connected to each other and are geographically bound to their territories and exist within a world that is anarchic in nature. A realist's second assumption is that states are the primary actors in international affairs and not other organizations such as NGO's or INGO's play a part in these interactions. States are acting out of the pursuit of their own interests, always attempting to maintain a high level of security and secure as many resources as possible ensuring the states survival. What realism comes down to is power. Every nation state is competing for power in any form, whether it is economic, political, through resources, or propoganda. Power rules all. Within realism we have subcategory neo-realism. Neo-realism pays more attention to the economic side of things. As a state you must fall within certain parameters to be competitive in the current anarchic political arena.

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On the other end of that, we have liberalism that views states as the decision makers for how they act or behave. There is more of a conscious component here in this theory. Liberalism holds that the way states decide to act or behave is heavily influenced by things like culture, economy, and government. One of the defining features of liberalism is the idea that there is an opening for cooperation among different levels of a nation state itself and other nation states around the world. One idea here that is in complete opposition to that of realism is the idea that you can have an absolute gain through the interaction of two nation states that are deciding to work together. This idea gets rid of the competition saga altogether, and realistically could work if things like resources and land were not finite (wiki, 2011). One interesting thing to note is that after some database analysis was done on the history of war between nation states of different governmental types they found that liberal democratic nation states had historically never gone to war with each other. So theoretically if every country became a liberal democracy around the world we could do away with war for good, now that is an extremely optimistic leap but the implications are interesting. Neoliberalism and or neoliberal institutionalism holds that the introduction of international institutions can bridge the gap between nation states and allow for successful cooperation.

Constructivism sometimes called idealism is the least popular of the three main recognized international political theories. This theory is a bit less concrete than the others as it revolves around the concept of ideas themselves. Constructivism holds that it is ideas that create the structure of international politics, and that nation states and

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their actors are actively recreating the ideas that support them. This is more an abstract view point and is popular in Europe. “Constructivist theory criticizes the static assumptions of traditional international relations theory and emphasize that international relations is a social construction (wiki, 2011).” This theory in its lack of solidarity and almost inability to be tested makes it unpopular among the scientific community and those that tend towards a more rational way of thought.

All of the current international political theories today have their strengths and weaknesses, and none can be used as an all inclusive marker in decision making. Each theory when applied to the same situation would produce an entirely different set of conclusions. “Ole Holsti describes international relations theories act as a pair of coloured sunglasses, allowing the wearer to see only the salient events relevant to the theory (wiki, 2011).” This variation of current political theories is extremely prevalent especially reflecting on the ambiguity of the Treaty of Westphalia. Maybe the focus should shift from international political theories to the foundation of international political relations set forth by the Treaty of Westphalia. Revisiting this foundation may allow for a more appropriate and accurate baseline for the language of international political relations to exist within.

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