

The Conceptual framework of Liberalism in the International Politics

Dr. MUHAMMAD TARIQ

Ph.D (Political Science) Elementary & Secondary Education Department District Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

Email: tariqawkum252@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper focuses on the conceptual framework of liberalism. It views the individual as the unit of analysis and considers it as the end in itself while the state is the means with very limited role. Free trade and open market mechanism are the basic concerns of this theory for which close cooperation, interaction and interdependence among the states is the sine qua non for it. The creation of regional and international organizations upholds the cause of protecting the integrity of individuals and states. The one violating the norms of international organizations are charged with sanctions. The theory manifests itself in the form of Classical Realism, Democratic Peace Theory and Neo-realism, each with its specific propositions. It believes in the peaceful means of conflict resolution through negotiations and diplomacy.

Keywords: Liberalism, Democratic Peace Theory, Conflict Resolution, Free Trade.

Introduction

Liberalism and Realism are two different theories of International Relations. Both present different schools of thought. Liberalism as a theoretical perspective concentrates on the individual as the unit of analysis. As opposed to realism, it is supposed to bring peace and harmony in the world. It stands for certain values and beliefs that will do away with wars and skirmishes in the world. It is also a criticism upon the theory of realism that fails to explain international cooperation and is restricted to the aspect of the national interest only (ARI, 2018). An important phenomenon in Liberalism is that it discusses coordination among the various countries of the world in a way similar to the fact that dilates upon the conflicts emanating from the anarchy of the international structure. This substantiates the view that international relations is the admixture of the conflictual and cooperative domain of relations (ARI, 2018). Looking through this prism, liberalism is a combination arising out of the combination of conflicts and cooperation among the states and the resultant behavior of states, non-state entities and individuals.

Liberalism is basically cooperative in its tradition, based on the freedom of humans, while at the same time, encompassing cooperation, interaction and interdependence. On the basis of this cooperation, the international organizations are accepted as important organs in fulfilling the common interest of the people and their prospects for peace. So, the regional and international organizations owe their existence to the liberalist school of thought for the resolution of conflict and disputes among nations. Another important aspect of this theory enjoins the view that political and economic sphere of the country cannot be separated from each other as separate units. Both are inter-related and interdependent upon each other for the stability of a country and the entire world.

Some liberalists are very close to the realist school of thought such as liberal institutionalism known as idealism. The idealist school of thought opines that the establishment of international organizations can change the world by determining codes of conducts for the smooth functioning of the world relations and

settlement of disputes that arise among the sovereign states. Thus, most of the skirmishes and disputes are resolved by the international organizations.

It was liberalism that was instrumental in shaping the post-Second World War politics. Many liberals argue that the end of the Cold War marked the victory of liberalism. Looking through this perspective, the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan as a result of US-Taliban and intra-Afghan talks marks the failure of realism and triumph of liberalism. US have spent almost 19 years in Afghanistan but have not been able to make it dance to its tune. Now, the US puts pressure on the Afghan government to expedite a peace deal with the Taliban is what can be termed as ‘cooperation, interaction and interdependence’ in the basic parlance of liberalism. Like Classical Realism, there is also classical liberalism which focuses on the basic concepts, assumptions and counter arguments.

Classical Liberalism

Classical liberalism owes its origin to primordial philosophers that have deep roots in domain of stoicism. John Locke was the first person to develop it as political theory in the 17th century whose philosophical and theological defense of property rights and religious toleration inspired liberal thinkers (Thorsen, 2010). His book, “Second Treatise on Government” deals with the freedom of individual and limited role of state (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012). According to John Locke, the state of nature is not a state of war, unlike Thomas Hobbes, but it is a state of freedom and is governed by the law of reason. So, human beings are equal and rational who are only concerned with their vested interests and have no concern for the right to freedom of other people. This results in the formation of a society whereby people get involved in securing their rights and different aspects of freedom. For John Locke, surrendering of the natural freedom by individuals for becoming a responsible member of the community is to form a “civil society through covenant and contract with others” results in a comfortable, peaceful and secure life (Ari, 2013).

According to Classical Liberalism, the function of state must be minimal meaning thereby to leave issue area save military, law enforcement and other non-excludable goods to the dealings of human beings while those mentioned are to be left to the government for implementation. Liberalism clearly draws a line of demarcation between various activities to be performed by the state and those that are to be performed by the individuals. The focus of classical liberalism is neither groups nor societies nor nations but individuals only. It is also a fact that liberals do not idealize the human but rather rationality, strength and flexibility of the human mind. To them human behaviors can be attributed to passions and emotions which distinguish them from the rest of the creatures. The concepts of right and wrong are shaped by impressions and ideas. In liberalism, the human conduct is very important in shaping the law since they observe one another in restraining their selfish motives and interests. The basic connotation of liberalism revolves around social phenomena which can be determined through individual behavior (Hatt, 2009).

The most important condition for classical liberalism is ‘freedom’ which is closely seen in relation to the involvement of the state in the life of the individual. Freedom refers to an area where the individual is free to act, without infringing upon the rights of others. This school of thought does not use the term freedom in its meaning of grinding one’s own axe at the cost of others; rather it does take care for the interest and benefit of other human beings. This leads to the development of symbiosis and does not go for parasitism, where one is concerned with one’s personal gains while harming the host body. It also gives importance for protection against invasion and interference by others. Freedom, according to this paradigm, covers all personal liberties, known as “personal security under the law”, the freedom of private property and contract, religious belief, intellectual inquiry and expression (Hatt, 2009).

An unchecked system or form of governments such as monarchical or dictatorial form of governments fails to protect the life, liberty and property of an individual (Meiser, 2017). Therefore the main concern of liberalism is to establish institutions for the protection of individual’s freedom by imposing checks and balances over the powers of the state and also delimit its role. Liberalism stands for the liberty and freedom

of the individual while imposing a limit on the authority of the state. For the liberalists the individual is the end while the state is the means to get that end. The concept of territorial expansion for the purpose of building empires and taking territory overseas are against the norms of liberalism (Hatt, 2009). The expansionist wars not only strengthen the state at the cost of the people but also require long term enterprises to the military engagement and political control over foreign territory and people. For liberalists the core issue is the development of a political system that that can provide protection to the people against foreign threats without subverting the liberty of the individuals (Meiseer, 2018). The notion of expansionism and territorial gains provide for military engagement abroad which restrict liberty of the people therefore, the liberalists stand for democratic governments which guarantee liberty of the individuals. Two important factors contribute towards the protection of liberty; firstly in liberal states an institutional check on the free and fair elections through which they impeach their rulers from powers. Secondly, the incorporation of the checks and balances systems with the division of power into legislative, executive and judiciary will also guarantee liberty (Meiseer, 2018).

Democratic Peace Theory may perhaps be the best contribution that liberalists can make towards the International Relations. This concept goes against the doctrine of war for the countries based on the notion of democracy (Meiseer, 2018). The reason behind it is two-fold; firstly democratic states are characterized by internal restraints on power. Secondly, democracies have a high capacity for cooperation with each other as they look upon each other as legitimate and unthreatening. Democratic peace theory is supported by historical and statistical analysis but several issue still persist in the way of this theory. Firstly, democracy owes its origin to recent development and few cases of democracies fight against one another. Secondly, there is no surety as to whether it is really democracy or some other force that correspond to peace such as power-hegemony, alliance, treaties, pacts, cultural aspects and economic factors. Another important thing about democracies is that they are usually aggressive towards non-democratic countries as when Afghanistan and Iraq was attacked by the United States and its allies in 2001 and 2003 respectively (Meiseer, 2018).

Democratic peace theory has two broad aspects; the structural perspective and the normative perspective. According to structural perspective, it is the various institutional departments represented by public functionaries and elected bodies and the office of the decision making unit that are accountable to the entire electorate. Their sense of responsibility and accountability make the war distasteful to the entire population of the state (Russet, 1993). Great cost and risks are attached with war and this affect great population at a time and will also lead to the ouster of the political party out of power if the war is lost. This view does not mean that all citizens and leaders in democracies are liberal- minded but it is likely that democratic leaders have to take into account the public opinion and are responsible to their voters (Owen, 1994) (Mansfield & Synder, 2005). The mechanisms of liberalism such as freedom of speech, political pluralism, and elections based on the spirit of competition have a tendency to go for peace and avoid war (Owen, 1994).

The normative perspective views that the existence of peace between the democracies can be enumerated through mutual democratic and liberal values (Elman, 1997). This view holds that the peaceful means for the resolution of conflicts are encouraged by the political culture of democracies which crosses the limits of domestic politics and get penetrated to other democratic states. This penetration is due to the fact that leaders in both the countries also stick to the view the other counterpart will also try for working out their conflicts through peaceful means (Elman, 1997). Political ideology, tells how differentiation is made between the ally and the adversary: democracies make distinction between allies and adversaries: democratic societies act in the interest of their citizens by bestowing more respect upon them, while non-democratic societies use the policy of aggression and subjugation against their citizens by looking down upon them with mistrust (Placek, 2012).

The greatest limitation on the democratic peace theory is it does not give proper course of action for conducting relations between the liberal states and the non-liberal state. Rawls opines that both these aspects may have equal weight-age in a "Society of People". He substantiates his argument by stating that the norms and values of the international law get their evolution and development through the aspects of

liberal and non-liberal values of the democracies. The basic framework for the melodious functioning of the liberal and non-liberal people under a common Law of People takes the liberal international theory into a more refined track (Rawls, 1999).

Fukuyama and Muller, the great liberalists, are of the view that liberalism has taken them to a period where war is losing its worth to be the weapon of diplomacy in the international relations (Burchill, 2005).

- a) Benefits of free trade are likely to integrate the individuals into a single whole. So, it is a unifying force for the community as a whole.
- b) It leads to widen the domain of contracts and levels of understanding among people of the world by encouraging international amicability and understanding.
- c) Free trade economy has the potential of unifying the entire society of nations through a common tie of interest and intercourse.

The concept of liberalism owes its origin to the period of post-World War II which showed its triumph. The various organs of the international institutions, other bodies and norms of the world are structured on the same basis as is used for the institutions and norms at the domestic level. It provides room for restraining the aggressive power of the state. This would result in watering down of the violent power of the state by weakening down the power that lies within the state through tactful means. For example, the international law prohibits war and aggression against other sovereign states. Though there is no international police system for the enforcement of this law, yet the aggressors and invaders know that breakage of this law would result in their defamation and backlash in the eyes of the international actors. In such cases states either individually or through collective body systems such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank go for imposing economic sanctions or opt for intervening militarily against the offender states. Moreover, the offender state also find itself isolated being deprived from the benefits of peace; gains and loans from the international actors, foreign aid and diplomatic recognition (Elman, 1997).

For a more understanding of the concept of liberalism it is necessary to dilate upon some of the cardinal principles which provide the basic parameters for it. Three basic principles shape the liberal world order (Daniel & Ikenberry, 1999). These principles are enshrined in the following lines.

- i) The international organizations are the source of giving forth the international law and agreements which in turn create an international system that does not work for just one state but rather acts as representative body of the entire nations. For example, the services rendered by the United Nations for the collection and distribution of the resources meant for common goals such as measures for improving climatic changes, making arrangements for diplomacy among the belligerent nations, declaring pandemic diseases and releasing of funds for the needy ones and giving a voice to every member state in the comity of nations.
- ii) The states that strongly support liberalism and the international organizations such as the WTO (GATT), the IMF and the WB provide opportunities for open, market-based, international economic system by upholding the cause of free trade and capitalistic approach in the entire world which ultimately result in the spirit of competition. The concept of free trade results in decreasing tension and conflict among the states and makes war less likely as war disrupts the benefits of trade. Free trade perverts war in all its forms as it is detrimental to trade and economy. It stands for peace and peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- iii) International norms are the third important factor of the international liberal order. These stand for the global coordination, protection of human rights across the world, care for democratic values and rule of law. Any action taken by a state which is not in consonance with these norms, subject the state to different sort of costs and sanctions. However, the international norms, on account of their wide variation in values, are often debated and contested. Those who violate international liberal norms are

directly subjected to costs on immediate basis. For example, China was imposed upon an arms sale embargo by the European Union for violent suppression of pro-democracy protestors in 1989 (MEISEER, 2018). As far as costs are concerned, they should not be very high but should be uniformly important. Costs can also be less direct but equally important. An example of this is the decrease in the favorable view of the US in the whole world on account of its invasion of Iraq in 2003 since the invasion was undertaken unilaterally and illegitimately.

These principles describe the various form of the classical liberalism, all of which are inter-related and interdependent. The first one upholds the view that the international organizations create the international law and agreements for the regularization of the states' relations. The second one focuses on the importance of the international organizations that explains the view of creating open market mechanism through the bodies of the IMF, WB, and WTO (GATT). The third one focuses on sees the significance of the international norms and those who violate the international norms are charged with costs and sanctions.

Neo-Liberalism

Neo-liberalism is a set of political beliefs which most prominently and prototypically include the conviction that the legitimate purpose of the state is the protection of individual, particularly commercial, liberty as well as strong private property (Hayek, 1979) (Mises, 1962). This conviction leads us to believe that the size and strength of the state minimum and compact while any intervention that does not fall within the domain of the state is not acceptable. This conviction is applicable to the international level as well as the national level where the system of open trade and open market has to be put into practical shape. The international trade can be regulated by safeguarding the liberal values of commerce and sturdy proprietary rights of the respective states but this must have its realization at the national level (Freidman, 2006).

Neo-liberalism is also concerned with the free adaptation of the market mechanism in the maximum manner to organize the interaction of goods and services (Norberg, 2001). Free trade and open market mechanism may result in setting free the original prospective and commercial aspect by putting it into the unprompted order of the society. This will result in greater individual liberty, greater welfare and well proficient distribution of resources (Rothbard, [1962/1970] 2004).

It is very important to note that neo-liberalism does not stand for an absolute political philosophical and ideological domain rather it denotes a flexible set of ideas which shows the mechanism for strengthening of relations between a state and its surrounding environment in an organized way (Malnes, 1998). But still it is ambiguous as to how political processes should be organized. For example, it says nothing about the existence of democracy and free exchange of political ideas. This supports the view that policies inspired by neo-liberalism could be implemented under the patronage of autocrats and liberal democracies (Harvey, 2005). Protagonists of this theory often criticize democracy being portrayed as skeptic: as the pragmatic practice of the policies of neo-liberalism would cater for the redistribution of power from the political sphere to the economic sphere, from the ownership of the state to the market mechanism and individuals, and finally from the legislative and executive bodies to the judicial body (Tranoy, 2006) (Osterud, Engelstad, & Sellle, 2003).

Conclusion

Like Realism, Liberalism presents a different school of thought the main purpose of which is the development of cooperation and coordination among the people at global level. It considers individual as the unit of analysis and averts war through different means and strategies. Traditionally, it stands for cooperation, interaction and interdependence among the various nations of the world. The sole objective of this cooperation is resolution of conflict. It also stands for harmony between the economic sphere and government. Like Realism, there is a school of thought called institutional liberalism or idealism which connote that the International and Regional Organization can help in conflict resolution and easily change

the world. The concept of classical liberalism owes its origin to the John Locke in the 17th Century. The concepts of property rights and religious toleration inculcated the spirit of liberalism. The role of state is very limited freedom of individual is everything. It is neither the groups, nor societies nor the state that matters but only the individuals that is everything. But it is equally significant that liberalism does not idealize individual but the elements of rationality, strength and flexibility of human mind.

Classical liberalism gives freedom of the individuals in a very befitting manner. According to it, human beings are free in their actions without any infringement from any quarter. The basic theme of this theory is the establishment of symbiotic relationship in which both the parties are beneficiaries. An unchecked system cannot protect the life, liberty and property of the individual. It is therefore utmost necessary to establish institutions for the protection of the individual which is termed as the end while the state is the means for getting that end. The establishment of democratic governments can be the best custodians of the liberty of the individual. The notion of free and fair elections and system of checks and balances guarantee the freedom of the individual.

The democratic peace theory makes great contribution towards the international relation theories. Democratic governments do not opt for war on account of two main points; they are restrained internally from power and secondly the high level of cooperation among the democratic states that restrain them from entering into war. The structural perspective of the democratic peace theory believes in the active role of the institutions that hold the elected officials responsible to the process of accountability. The normative perspective of the democratic peace theory stresses that peace can be explained through shared values of democracy and liberalism. It stands for the encouragement of the peaceful means for the resolution of conflict. The post-World War II made room for the creation of international liberal structure for the improvement of relations among the states and the violators are served upon different sanctions of various natures by the UN and its related bodies, the IMF and the WB.

Neo-liberalism is mainly concerned with the protection of the individuals 'commercial, private and other rights which focus on the minimal role of the state by giving priority to individual over the state. It is binding upon the state to take all necessary arrangements that may help in upholding the cause of the individual. The system of free market and free trade will lead to the liberty of the individual in many ways. The concept of neo-liberalism refers to a loose set of ideas that provide a strong link of relationship between the state and external environment. However, it is silent over the issue of existence of democracy and free exchange of political ideas.

Liberalism is the need of the modern world where no nation of the world is independent in the true sense of the word. The creation of the international organizations such as the UN, IMF and the WB, and other regional organizations provide assistance to the member states for many purposes and improving the existing political systems and bringing in of reforms in the governmental structure for attaining the maximum benefits. It is also equally important that the countries not complying with the manifestos of liberalism for the advancement of free trade and open market mechanism are penalized with sanctions. One of the greatest criticisms on this theory is that it encourages competition, capitalism and survival of the fittest in a competitive society.

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