



NEOREALIST AND NEOLIBERAL INTERPRETATIONS TO GLOBAL REGIONALISM

Political Science

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ABSTRACT

Regionalism is manifested through the urge and practice of devolution of power in a defined geographical territory based on social, economic, political, cultural or security factors. The devolution is not necessarily administrative. It might also take into account emotional dimension of such unification and diversification. This kind of regionalism is well pronounced in states that practise federalism. This evokes the feeling of sub-nationalism with the process of decentralization.

On the contrary, for the sake of proper understanding of the phenomenon of global regionalism, we would separately deal with each kind of regionalism – economic regionalism, political regionalism and security regionalism. This paper also deals in-depth about the relationship of the liberal and realist theories of IR and each kind of regionalism.

KEYWORDS

Regionalism on global lines:

Regionalism has got a second face which incorporates the process of integration and cooperation among different nation-states or countries in the same region of the world. In this paper, we are more concerned about the global perspective of regionalism.

The general view that world politics is being increasingly shaped by global happenings, is getting reconfigured by the challenge posed by 'world of regions'. Thus in the purview of latest global developments, regionalism is the immediate successor of both the nation-state and the new globalization trends.

The supra-national cooperation and subsequent alliances among nation-states, since 1945 and particularly in the 1960s and the 1980s resulted into the formation of regional blocs all over the world. These regional blocs either took the form of trade blocs or economic blocs or were set up on the notion of building political and security regimes.

Neoliberal Interpretation to Economic Regionalism:

Economic Regionalism portrays the greater regional integration and economic cooperation among states in the same geographical region. This phenomenon has become even more persistent through the advent of the so-called 'new' regionalism since the early 1990s, manifested in the growth of regional trade blocs and the strengthening of existing trade blocs.

While liberalism has been the dominant ideological force shaping the western political thought and institutions, neoliberalism emerged as a restructured face of the 'old' liberal interpretations. The advent of the decade of 1970s spearheaded the neoliberal campaign, revolving around four key themes of neoliberalism – Interdependence liberalism, Republican liberalism, Institutional Liberalism and Sociological Liberalism.

One way of viewing this trend of economic regionalism is interpreting it on lines of interdependence liberalism. The underlying notion of interdependence liberalism is the creation of what, neoliberals Keohane and Nye called 'complex interdependence'. Thus Regional blocs like European Union (EU) in Europe, The Association of South-East Nations (ASEAN) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Asia, North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in America, African Union (AU) in Africa, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Asia-Pacific, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in Euro-Atlantic, Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) for instance were formed by their respective member states not only on the economic realm but also to justify the fact that free trade is no less important in drawing the member nations into a web of economic interconnectedness, which eventually means that the material costs of international conflicts and subsequently war are so high that warfare becomes virtually unthinkable. Especially, in the era of globalisation, where the economic fabric of the world is woven based on competitive trade, no country would dare to spend its limited resources on warfare to lag behind in the international power hierarchy, devised in terms of soft power.

Neoliberal Interpretation to Political Regionalism:

Political Regionalism refers to the process of creation and

reconfiguration of regional strategic blocs by states willing to strengthen or protect shared values, thereby enhancing their position and diplomatic voice in international power hierarchy.

Political liberalism, when viewed using the lens of interdependence liberalism, it can be well perceived that the ultimate interdependence persistent among different member nations in a regional bloc, is a consequence of common will to emerge as regional powers. That can prevail only if the agenda gets widened to incorporate within itself, subjects like welfare, environment protection, political justice, holistic development, etc.

On the contrary, the school of republican liberalism stresses on peace and international harmony, provided that member states are neither autocratic nor authoritarian states, but democratic states instead. The republican liberals, moreover, hold that authoritarian and totalitarian states are inherently unstable, primarily because of absence of popular institutional mechanisms. This is clearly on the line of Francis Fukuyama's conception of democratic peace thesis. But my contention is that the so-called 'zones of turmoil' do often form informal diplomatic blocs, if not formal mergers. The informal organisation prevailing in the Kurdish region in the Middle East including eastern Turkey, northern Iraq and certain parts of Syria and Iran, clearly negate the democratic peace thesis. Thus, political regionalism can be materialized even on authoritarian lines.

Another sub-discipline of neoliberalism – institutional liberalism or liberal institutionalism emphasizes on the presence of 'external' mechanism. Thus, adventurist ambitions of the sovereign states can be constrained by influence of international organisations. But, on the other hand, policy adventurism of any state is determined by the functionalist approach to regionalism. The active role played by a particular state-actor being described as 'actorness' of a state possess an immense potential to influence and shape the idea of functionalism of a regional cooperation. Thus, whatsoever and at whatever extent the international community puts pressure on the Middle East, the latter can avoid it by strategic regulation of natural resources of the countries in the Middle East. Thus, this concept opens up a new dimension of viewing neoliberal interpretation of political regionalism.

Neorealist Interpretation to Political Regionalism:

Realism or more aptly, classical realism is often portrayed as 'power politics' model of international politics. The level of analysis in classical realism is state-centric. The classical realists view states as coherent and cohesive units, and subsequently, regard them as the most important actors of global politics. It holds that statecraft emanates from the national interest and national security. Hans Morgenthau advocated such traditional stance. But with the growing importance of international politics, diplomatic relations and military assertiveness, hard power of a nation came to increasingly viewed as a necessary prerequisite to enhance its position in the mentally constructed power ladder or hierarchy.

As a knee-jerk reaction, the 1970s onwards, neorealist ideas evolved through the systems theory approach. Thus, it came to increasingly

viewed as structural realism. This new approach made its stance clear that the foreign policy or actions of a particular state is shaped on the international anarchy prevailing, thus, resulting in a system of 'self-help', 'security dilemma' and 'relative gains'. Kenneth Waltz put forth a detailed account of this international system.

Neorealists claim that the presence of the international anarchy compels the states to rely on their own resources to realise their interests, underlying the notion of 'self-help'. But, it should be noted here that, regional blocs all around the world do create a common fund to help other member states in crisis situations. Trans-national cooperation among states in the same geographical area clarifies the fact that member states of regional political or diplomatic blocs do form a pool of capacities, resources and support to ensure security and survival of the entire region on a joint venture. For instance, a regional forum – Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technological and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in South Asia and South East Asia region was primarily formed to enhance the political and diplomatic position of its member nations through leveraging technological and economic boost. This is partially in favour of and partially against globalisation. Regional forums are certainly not world-wide international platforms, but these do have the potential to influence world-wide politics.

Now shifting focus to security dilemma, it depicts that relationships between and amongst states are 'always' characterized by uncertainty and suspicion. Hence, a national government suffers from what is called, security dilemma. Even this contention is negated by the fact that barring a few powerful states, the less powerful ones in Asia, Africa and the Middle East barring a few powerful ones, which hardly have any economic or military assertiveness do often rely on its neighbouring powerful ones to get assistance, when needed. Not going into another round of debates, let's take the example of the Doklam standoff crisis in 2017. When Bhutanese government could not resist the Chinese military assertiveness in the trijunction region, the former had to rely on the Indian military to take its position. This has two faces. Firstly, it clearly elaborates the security dilemma between India and China. Secondly, the friendly move from Indian side to resist Chinese forces to intrude into Bhutanese border negates the concept of security dilemma, at least from the viewpoint of India-Bhutan relations. This incident deters from the neorealist concept that uncertainty about motives forces states to treat all other states as hostile, aggressive and to view them as enemies. A remarkable dimension to analyse this issue, the BIMSTEC plays a vital role as a political backing to the less powerful and small sized states of Asia, against such imminent threats. This consequently, elevated the political and diplomatic voice of the BIMSTEC countries especially against regional powers and the Asian superpower.

Another pertinent stance of neorealism is that, conflict is encouraged by the fact that states are primarily concerned about maintaining (status quo states) or improving (revisionist states) their position relative to other states, with the motivations of 'relative gains'. This, according to this particular school of thought, discourages cooperation and reduces the effectiveness of the international organizations. This might be a matter of concern, especially in the era of globalisation. But, this might not be the case. Infact, regional forums are an imperative for the proper internationalisation of domestic or regional events. The supra-national forums in turn enhance the efficacy of smooth running of the international organisations. Moreover, it should be noted that 'revisionist' states do not always adopt violent means to fulfil their targets. The contemporary Balance of Power (BoP) has shifted so much so that there are regional backings to certain countries which dare to contest for the P5 seats of the UN Security Council by challenging the authority and legitimacy of the P5 member states. Thus, political regionalism is rather the foundation stone of establishing new authority in regional organisations, thereby, providing suitable platforms for the states to acquire higher diplomatic and political voice to contest in the international organisations and usher in a new era of restructured balance of power system.

Neorealist Interpretation to Security Regionalism:

Security Regionalism refers to attempts by states to form cooperation among states, to protect themselves from common enemies, either neighbouring or distant ones. Thus regional integration may give rise to what Carl Deutsch referred to as 'security community'. According to Andrew Heywood, the regional forums primarily seek to enmesh their members within a system of 'peace through cooperation'. This

phenomenon increases the levels of interdependence and interconnectedness, particularly in matters relating to economy, so much so that warfare becomes virtually unthinkable. Regional cooperation to gain protection against a common external enemy gets manifested through regional peacekeeping.

The dimensions of self-help, security dilemma and relative gains of neorealism, already discussed in the earlier section are equally apt in this section as well.

As a matter of fact, the neorealists, in common to the traditional classical realists opine that international conflicts can be well contained by the balance of power. Neorealists view the 'balance of power' as a consequence of the inescapable power politics and structural dynamics of the international system, while the classical realists view the same as a product of prudent statecraft. This leads us to the concept of 'polarity'. But, regional blocs formed on strategic and security reasons often adopt such policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that intend to portray both the hard power and soft power of the regional forum and consequently, its member states. It is essentially 'bloc-craft' rather than statecraft that restructure the balance of power. The build-up of joint military capacity for defensive purposes and provision of joint military exercises among its member states clearly depict that balance of power is devised on the lines of higher degree of security regionalism.

The neorealists have generally associated bipolar systems with stability and a reduced likelihood of war, while multipolar systems have been associated with instability and a greater likelihood of war. A fun fact, the cold-war period marking the strife between the USA and the erstwhile USSR is often regarded a state of political imbroglia. The probability of direct confrontation was very high which had immense potential to take the shape of a late 20th century war. Fortunately this did not happen, thanks to nuclear deterrence between the erstwhile superpowers. On the contrary, the present-day multipolar balance of power system is considered more peaceful, especially when all the existing regional powers tend to follow an ensuing path of smooth revision of balance of power system. Keeping apart the debates between offensive realists and defensive realists, a pertinent fact is that the nations are forming regional security blocs with the primary motive of national security and survival. Thus, the contemporary trend of prudent statecraft is the act of joining such forums in the best national interest.

In the purview of security regionalism, another approach to view the regional security is the understanding of the level of 'regional insecurity' posed by global perception of viewing the so-called 'failed' states. For instance, the formation of an informal mutual entente in the Kurdish region including eastern Turkey, northern Iraq and parts of Syria and Iran is a result of the extreme western influence on these countries. The most relevant reason behind formation of such regional security blocs is to protect their unique cultural identity, woven by the local socio-economic fabric of those nations. The increasing trends of globalisation and westernization, and the rampant western influence on the cultural identity of these nation-states has ruffled much of the indigenous cultural fabric. To preserve and protect the cultural identity and security of the countries in the Middle East, they had no other choice than to form regional security blocs in accordance with national security and best national interests. The same is the case with the underdeveloped African nations as also with the case of Asian and Southeast Asian nations.

Security is a holistic concept. Though the traditional idea is hard power security, the contemporary trend is a mix of hard power security as well as soft power security. The security regional blocs are formed, even with a motive to address issues on development and social welfare, environment protection, natural disaster management and ensure security in these sectors as well. Thus, security can be political stability and security, social stability and security, cultural identity and security, environmental protection and ecological security, economic prosperity and security, physical safety and security besides the age-old tradition of territorial integrity and security. These issues are also vital national interests. Therefore, regional security blocs can as well take these issues to resolve the prevailing crises situations in accordance with neorealist approach to national safety and security through holistic growth and development.

Degree of sense of regionalism around the globe:

Taking into consideration the key 'functional' and high impact regional

organizations and regional blocs around the world, there are seven regional blocs in Asia and Africa, six in America, four in Europe, three in Asia-Pacific, two in Eurasia and Euro-Atlantic. (Refer Table 20.1, Global Politics by Andrew Heywood). Analysing the given data, Africa and Asia have highest sense of regionalism among its member nation-states.

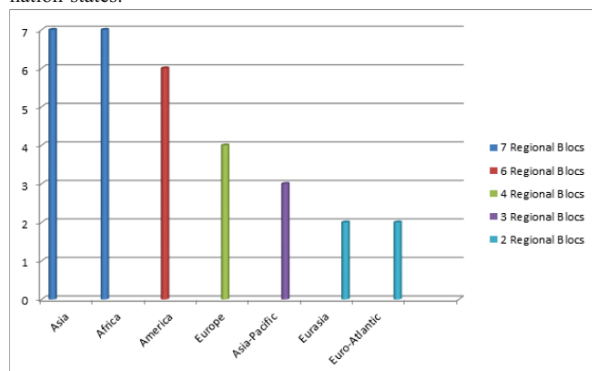


Table 1.1 Sense of Regionalism across regions

CONCLUSION:

Thus, regionalism in a global perspective sets forth a win-win condition on all member states of regional blocs. Summing up the entire analysis, economic regionalism, political regionalism and security regionalism have got many dimensions, much beyond the age-old traditional view points. The neoliberal and neorealist interpretations of each kind of regionalism possess the potential to resolve major existing problems all around the world. Moreover, it sets forth a new level of analysis, neither state-level nor international-level, but essentially on a regional level. The interpretations can be implemented in reality to usher in a new era of supra-national cooperation, certainly not a utopian thought. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda 2030 can be fulfilled on the lines of such interpretation, incorporating the ideas of holistic growth and development.

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