

The struggle for pie and peace **All state leaders are realists. Why?**

All state leaders are realists. But why? The straightforward answer seems to be “because they have to be”, which in turn leads to the question “Why do they have to be, in order to function as state leaders?”

At the current stage of human history, the world is divided into almost 200 nation-states, with each state possessing a permanent population, a government, a territory defined by borders and the capacity to enter into relations with other states. Considering these prerequisites, the job-description for a state leader entails the requirement of a realist approach to the task at hand.

A realistic approach to state-leading consists of a belief that the international system is anarchic and that sovereign states are the primary actors in international affairs. Within this system, each nation-state is a rational actor trying to assert its own self-interest and security. Balances of power dominate international affairs and have to be managed in a favourable way by those chosen as state leaders.

Realist state-leaders can be compared with children at a birthday party. Everybody tries to grab the largest piece of the pie, and those who end up with the smallest pieces are either weak and socially insecure or did so for strategic reasons, as they do not like pie and will demand a larger share of the bonbons afterwards, which serve his or her interest better. There is no universal moral principle at work, when the one who does not like pie waives his interest, as the renunciation is part of a rational strategy aimed at the maximisation of personal interest once the bonbons come around. A state leader not capable of securing the most pie or most bonbons possible for his people has failed, as the world is anarchic and without a parent who might undermine realist strategies at the table by serving the cake slice-wise. It is also well known that most children’s birthday parties bring along tears at some point of time; here we can then see balances of power (or shifts in those) at work.

Realist strategies can be divided into different patterns of behaviour: maximal realism and minimal realism. Under maximal realism, the position of the hegemon, the most powerful entity at the birthday table, is the most desirable. Under minimal realism, those who are non-hegemonic will ally against the hegemon in order to secure their own interests. Thus, cooperation is just based on the idea of maximising ones own influence and power. The rational conclusion is, that isolation will result in less pie than cooperation for the common in the name of individual interest. Relations are thus controlled by relative power, which everybody tries to secure at least or maximise at best. Those who do not subdue themselves to the birthday party relations end up without pie, with tears in their eyes and possibly no invitation to the next party.

Should, for reasons that seem to be based on higher morals, the bully at the table decide to divide the pie equally among all guests, political realism rightfully refuses to identify his moral aspirations with the moral laws that govern the universe. By acting righteous and morally sound the bully just hides his own aspirations.

This short analogy, “The struggle for pie and peace”, concludes why all state leaders have to be realists and believe in balances of power at work. If an archaic world offers no greater authority than the nation-state, then all action by the state-leader has to be motivated by nothing but the rationally pursued interests of those he represents.