

Classical Realism vs Neo-Realism: A Comparative Analysis

International Relations (IR) theories are broadly categorized into several frameworks that attempt to explain how nations interact with each other. Two prominent theories, Classical Realism and Neo-Realism, are often discussed together due to their shared focus on power dynamics and state interests. Let's dive into the core principles, differences, and implications of these theories.

Classical Realism

Classical Realism, rooted in the works of thinkers like Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hans Morgenthau, emphasizes the inherent flaws in human nature, leading states to prioritize self-interest and security. Key aspects include:

- Human Nature: Sees humans as flawed, self-interested, and power-seeking.
- State as Primary Actor: Nation-states are key players in IR.
- Anarchy and Self-Help: International system is anarchic; states rely on self-help for survival.
- Power and Interest: Pursuit of power and national interest drives state behavior.

Morgenthau's "Politics Among Nations" (1948) is a seminal work, outlining principles like "interest defined as power."

Neo-Realism (Structural Realism)

Neo-Realism, developed by Kenneth Waltz in "Theory of International Relations" (1979), shifts focus from human nature to the structure of the international system. Key points:

- Systemic Structure: Emphasizes the anarchic structure of the international system.
- State as Rational Actor: States are rational, unitary actors seeking survival.
- Balance of Power: States balance power to ensure security; system structure influences behavior.
- Security and Survival: Primary goal is survival; military power is crucial.

Implications and Criticisms

- Classical Realism: Criticized for pessimistic view of human nature; struggles to explain cooperation.
- Neo-Realism: Seen as too structural, neglecting domestic factors; challenged by constructivist and liberal theories.

Summary

While both theories focus on power and state interests, Classical Realism emphasizes human nature and self-interest, whereas Neo-Realism highlights the structural constraints of the international system. Understanding these perspectives helps analyze state behavior and global

dynamics.