

NATIONAL INTEREST IN SECURITY SCIENCE: A REALIST PERSPECTIVE

Pregledni rad (Review Paper)

Received: 14 November 2021

Accepted: 7 December 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37458/nstf.22.3.3>

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is a review of the conceptualization of national interest in the theoretical assumptions of realism. A review of the literature and its analysis provides an overview of the main findings of prominent realists who shaped the national interest and created a solid foundation for future research: Hans Morgentau, Raymond Aron, and Kenneth Waltz. Consequently, the scientific goals of this paper are to summarize the scope and manner of national interest's thematization in realist's research and, to analyze the significance of their scientific contribution to the Science of Security.

National interest remains one of the most important terms in Security Science. A prudent articulation of national interests is a key factor for the security of any state, so understanding this concept is extremely important for Security Science theorists. A realistic understanding of the national interest as a key driver, but also a determinant of the behavior of states concerning other states, is still relevant today.

Keywords: national interest, security, security science, security policy, realism

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary theoretical approaches in Security Science claim to diminish and reduce the importance of the state in a modern, globalized world. According to them, a state's autonomy is undermined through various factors as the existence of transnational actors, economic interdependence, or technological progress and trends. However, as Alexander Wendt noticed (1999, p. 238), states show an impressive resilience to such attempts and remain the most important actor in international relations, as well as the referent object of security. In times of crisis, which is best demonstrated by the current COVID 19 pandemic, states can certainly count only on their capacities, and state borders become easily transformed into physical barriers in the traditional sense. Accordingly, the national interest, which is related to the existence of the state,

remains a relevant concept in Security Science. This concept is used for a better understanding of the state's behavior in international relations, but it also represents a quality analytical tool for analyzing national security.

All states, regardless of the power they possess, seek to pursue their national interests. Great powers can define their national interests ambitiously, i.e. their interests can be projected miles from their state borders and without the consent of other states. On the other hand, for small states, the essence of politics is based on achieving and preserving internal stability. The policy-making of a small state is conditioned by the established balance of interests of great powers as well as political articulation and protection of national interests. As a result, national interest becomes a valuable analytical framework for understanding security, or as Wolfers observed "*the formula of the national interest has come to be practically synonymous with the formula of national security* (Wolfers, 1952, p. 482).

The term "national interest" has been used by statesmen and scholars since the founding of the nation-states to describe the aspiration and goals of sovereign entities in the international area (Neuchterlein, 1976, p.246). The expansion of scientific researches on national interest started with the beginning of the Cold War. According to Rosenau, the efforts of analysts to evaluate the foreign policy that led to the Second World War stimulated the study of the national interest. In that period, the most important role in those researches had realists who focused on a different aspect of national interest. Rosenau had analyzed their work, and he established one of the most significant distinctions of national interest as the analytical concept and the means of political action. "*As an analytic tool, it is employed to describe, explain, or evaluate the sources or the adequacy of a nation's foreign policy. As an instrument of political action, it serves as a means of justifying, denouncing, or proposing policies*" (Rosenau, 1968, p.34). The concept of national interest has a special significance in Security Sciences where, in addition to the concept of power, security, anarchy, survival, the balance of power, etc. it occupies an important place in the set of analytical tools. It has been transformed from a term used to give legitimacy to decision-makers' statements

into a framework that provides guidelines for assessing the security policies of the state. In that way, decision-makers are reminded that conducting an active and smart national security policy necessarily implies prudent articulation of the national interests of the state.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF NATIONAL INTEREST IN REALISM

National interest is a complex term, and there is no universally accepted definition of national interest among scholars. The understanding of this concept is conditioned by the paradigms of the approach within which it is analyzed as well as the understanding of the theorists themselves. From the perception of national interest as a central concept in the understandings of some realists to the complete neglect by theorists of most alternative (or modern) approaches, this term demonstrates diversity of understanding, richness of ideas, criticism that leads to even more fruitful research, but puts (returns?) focus on the question of the state as a referent object in modern security.

Realism represents one of the most important schools of thought in International Relations and Security Science. Realists focus their research interest on the state, as the central actor in the anarchic international system, who acts in rational self-interest. Within this theoretical approach, different variations had appeared (classical, neorealism, neoclassical, offensive, defensive realism), but all those research concepts are based on three assumptions: states are assumed to be atomistic, self-interested, and rational; states' interests are assumed to be exogenous to social interaction because states enter in social relations with their interests already been formed; society is understood as a strategic realm in which states come together to pursue and maximize their predefined interests. Realists argued that in international politics focus of research should be on discovering the important forces that drive the relations between states. They believed that the pursuit of power and national interest were the major forces driving world politics (Steans et al., 2010, p.54).

Realism claims that in the international environment all states behave following their national interests. The most important national interest is the survival of the state, and it depends on the power that the state has at its disposal. Furthermore, how this international environment is characterized by constant struggle, the interests of states inevitably clash. Therefore, states are insecure, and they must make sure that their power is sufficient to counter the threats of other states. Security of a state requires the rational management of power, and only policies conducted in this spirit can serve the national interest. The realist whose prolific writing on the national interest has been the most influential as well as the most criticized is Hans Morgenthau. Morgenthau's writing on national interest gave form and direction to those researches, but that wasn't his only merit. His research motivated or provoked discussion from other theorists that gave a great contribution to the development of national interest as a valuable analytical tool for researching security phenomena such as Raymond Aron and Kenneth Waltz.

MORGENTHAU'S VISION OF NATIONAL INTEREST

The thematization of the national interest within realism began after the Second World War when the power and survival of the state were determined as the core of the national interest. Thus, Hans Morgenthau, one of the most important theorists of international relations and the founder of the realpolitik school of thought, positions power and national interest at the center of his theoretical thinking about relations between states. Morgenthau stated that international politics is essentially a struggle for power (Morgenthau, 1948, p.13). For him, power is the core of any politics because all of them can be reduced to one of three basic types: keeping power, increasing power, or demonstrating power (Morgenthau, 1948, p.21). Morgenthau believed that the national interest determined in the categories of power is a mechanism used to understand international politics, ie „referring to the national interest as the standard of evaluation for foreign policies planned and pursued” (Morgenthau, 1949, p.208). Focusing on the question of what is the national interest, Morgenthau does not conceptualize the definition of the national

interest but clarifies it more closely by identifying its two elements „one that is logically required and in that sense necessary, and one that is variable and determined by circumstances“ (Morgenthau, 1952, p. 972). The survival of the state is at the core of the first element and it can be determined in a specific situation because it “encompasses the integrity of the nation's territory, of its political institutions, and of its culture”. The variable element of national interest is less subject to precise determination and coverage “cross-currents of personalities, public opinion, sectional interests, partisan politics, and political and moral folkways” (Morgenthau, 1952, p.973). This categorization is important for classical realists who believe that the core of national interest is always the state's survival regardless of the degree of power that the state possesses. At the same time, this distinction is highly criticized, and scholars resent Morgenthau for not making enough effort to specify and clarify the variable elements of the national interest, as well as the relationship between the variable and necessary elements of the national interest.

Morgenthau systematizes political realism based on six principles which he incorporates in the second edition of „Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace“. The first principle states that political realism is based on the belief that politics is governed by objective laws rooted in human nature (Morgenthau, 1997: p.4-5). The foundation of Morgenthau's realist theory is based on the concept of interests defined in terms of power, which is the second principle - statesmen think and act in terms of national interest defined as power (1997, p. 5). This principle tends to indicate the autonomy of politics and the possibility of its analysis regardless of the different tendencies, motives, intellectual and moral qualities of political leaders. Although, as Morgentau explains in the third principle, the national interest defined in terms of power is a universally valid category and an essential element of politics that isn't fixed once and for all. Its content and manner of use are determined by the political and cultural environment (1997, p. 10-11).

Other principles of Morgenthau's political realism are indirectly related to the national interest: political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action as well as the tension

between morality and the conditions necessary for successful political action; political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe and the political realist maintains the autonomy of political sphere, as the economist, the lawyer, the moralist maintains their (Morgenthau, 1997:12-14).

Morgenthau's six principles of political realism suggest the following: the national interest defined as a power is a central concept that transforms politics into an autonomous discipline. For this discipline, it can be said that is rationally based because its deals with the state as a rational actor that pursue its national interests. Although being aware of them, political realism is not concerned with the morals, religious beliefs, motives, or ideological preferences of individual political leaders. Morgenthau does not follow the Machiavellian path of removing morality from politics but gives it another meaning. He believes that any policy guided by national interests is a moral policy, although it is not always under universal moral principles. The morality of prudent political action Morgenthau finds in the achievement of goals of national survival and protection of citizens' lives. Also, Morgenthau introduces the normative aspect of his theory - rationality, so rational foreign policy is "good foreign policy". For Morgenthau rationality represents the process of calculating costs and benefits of all alternative policies to determine their ability to maximize power. In that process, only the intellectual weakness of statesmen can lead to policy diversion from a rational course of maximizing the power of the state. For that reason, the pursuit of power represents rational state behavior and has been elevated to the level of the norm. As Burchill noticed, the national interest is normally defined in terms of strategic and economic capability because international politics is seen primarily as a struggle for power between states. However, Morgenthau concedes that the definition of power will change over time: in some cases, military power will be crucial, and in others, it may be economic or cultural power (Burchill, 2005, p. 36). In this way, Morgenthau leaves the possibility for other features to be identified as elements of national interest.

ARON'S CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL INTEREST

Numerous theorists, including Raymond Aron, believe that Morgenthau sees power ambiguously: as a means or an end in politics. If power is only a means to achieve other goals, it does not define the nature of international politics in the way Morgenthau claims. Most important, it does not allow us to understand the actions of states independently from the motives and ideological preferences of their political leaders (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017, p. 23). Realists do not dispute the importance of power for determining the national interest but also believe that it is not possible to explain this concept only through power, so it is necessary to include other aspects such as ideology and morality. Raymond Aron sees the national interest as a category that corresponds to elements of power and strength of a given state, but he also perceives that the national interest is not exclusively related to foreign policy because interests are a historical category. According to Aron, the main goal of smaller states (states with less amount of power) is subsistence. When it comes to more powerful states, their main goal cannot be reduced only to survive; it is necessary to include physical space, glory, ideas, and, ultimately, the desire to influence the behavior and actions of others. Determining foreign policy goals is important because it establishes the essence of the national interest of a country (Словић, 2010, p. 116).

Aron believes that it is important to consider one more factor when it comes to discussing national interests, and that is the state "satisfaction". If a state is satisfied with its borders, level of economic development, or status quo, it will project national interests in a way that preserves the existing state position in international relations. On the other hand, „dissatisfaction“ is mainly associated with a policy in which underdeveloped countries play a role as potential destroyers of such a system (Словић, 2014, p.90). Frankel noticed that Aron's greatest contribution to the theory of power, in addition to recognizing the complexity of the relationship between security and force is the observation of the importance of state "satisfaction". Also, Aron adds the goal of 'glory', of securing the satisfaction of the nation and its esteem by others. This is an important addition because the pursuit of glory cannot be equated with the seeking of

prestige, which is directly an element of power (Frankel, 1970:50). At the same time, Aron emphasizes the specifics of the concept itself because national interests are not the same for all states, but differ in accordance with the scope of power that the state has at its disposal. National interests are changeable and conditioned by the real circumstances in the analyzed period, and at the same time, they should not be tied exclusively to foreign policy, given that they are a historical component. They are not defined only in terms of power (which Aron distinguishes from force) but include another variable, and that is the satisfaction of the state with its status in international relations.

WALTZ INTERPRETATIONS OF NATIONAL INTEREST

Within neorealism, Kenneth Waltz perceives the national interest differently from most classical realists and gives new meanings to this term. Waltz argues that the national interest is a product of the structure of the international system so the individual (political leader) has no significant influence on its determination. He does not analyze the meaning and role of the national interest for foreign policy and state security, and for him, the fact that the states strive to achieve their national interests is not unusual. The question of interest for Waltz refers to means that states have adopted for achievement of national interests, i.e. what activities states should take to successfully pursue their national interests. To clarify this view, Waltz makes an analogy between a state that can rely only on self-help and a company operating in a competitive international environment. Waltz states that if we compare nations and corporations, the elusive notion of the national interest will become clearer. By assumption, economic factors tend to maximize the expected profit, and the states to ensure their survival. Leading companies find themselves in a situation of self-help when their survival is conditioned by their efforts within limits established by law. When they find themselves in a self-help situation, the survival of the company is a more important goal than profit since survival is a prerequisite for achieving all other goals (Waltz, 1979, p.134).

According to Waltz, states cannot exert much influence on an anarchic international system. They can only formulate policies that will position the survival of the state as a more significant interest than others, such as economic interests. The absence of a higher political authority forces states to prioritize security and survival over other demands. Waltz concludes that the state's behavior in accordance with its national interests implies that the state has examined its security requirements and strives to implement them. Realization of national interests implies that diplomatic and military activities must be carefully planned, or the survival of the state will be in jeopardy (Waltz, 1979:134).

Waltz believes that each state decides for itself in what way and by what means it will defend its national interests. "To say that a state is sovereign means that it decides for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems, including whether or not to seek assistance from others and in doing so to limit its freedom by making commitments to them" (Waltz, 1979, p. 96). In assessing whether states should pursue their interests through cooperation with other states, attention is paid to relative goals. In a situation of potential cooperation for the common good, states must reconsider how the profit will be divided. There is a danger that one state will use more profit to implement a policy aimed at damaging or destroying another state (Waltz, 1979, p. 105). This attitude implies that the nature of alliances based on relative profit is short-lived, given that a state that makes more profit in distribution can indirectly increase its power, thus creating a position to terminate cooperation and pursue its interests by other means. A state that makes less profit may also seek to change the terms of cooperation or end it. For this reason, states are reluctant to cooperate, as there is no supreme authority to ensure compliance with the agreement.

Thus neorealism shares skepticism with classical realism about the possibility of cooperation between states. The fact that states must pursue their national interests indicates that all forms of cooperation are only provisional arrangements that will be set aside if they conflict with the national interests of states (Jackson, Sørensen, 2013, p. 67). Neorealists believe that the core of national interest is security, while power is a useful tool for achieving security. Referring to Waltz's conclusions about the

national interest, Scott Burchill made several observations: first, states can only influence but not control the anarchic international environment they find themselves in. Then, the survival of the state must take precedence over any state policy, such as economic prosperity or higher ethical standards of action. Therefore, the basis of the national interest is the security of the state in an environment over which states do not have much influence. And third, the capacity of a state to achieve security will be determined by its relative rather than absolute power — that is, concerning other states (Burchill, 2005, p. 44-45). Burchill notes that unlike Morgenthau, who argues that states strive for absolute power, Waltz claims that states strive for security which can be achieved with relative power because that is the best way they can ensure their survival in an anarchic world (Burchill, 2005, p. 45-46). For classical realists the national interest is the basic guide of responsible foreign policy: it is a moral idea that must be defended and promoted by state leaders. On the other hand, for neorealist, the national interest seems to operate like an automatic signal instructing political leaders how to act. States are structures that react to the impersonal limitations and dictates of the international system (Jackson, Sørensen, 2013, p. 81).

NATIONAL SECURITY AND NATIONAL INTEREST AS INSEPARABLE PARADIGMS

National interest is an important term for understanding the model on which the state operates and permeates many spheres of life, such as politics, culture, economy, and security. At one point in the past, it seemed that the national interest as part of the research field of international relations exclusively, because the most numerous and most fruitful research on this topic was realized within this science. Today, there is a need for an interdisciplinary approach in research due to the changed circumstances in modern security architecture and the constellation of new threats. Thus, the need to reconsider the position of national interest as a concept that is (primarily) related to foreign policy research within the science of international relations has arisen. Whether we determine the

content of this term through power, force, identity, norms, ideologies, etc., we certainly speak of categories that are immanent to the Security sciences or represent a general place of discursive thinking. Thus, the Science of International Relations that has established national interest in its conceptual framework loses the exclusive right to this concept and gives it to the general corpus of knowledge.

The focus of Security Science is primarily the security of the nation-state and the basic subject of research in this science is the state. Thus, Security is Science about the condition of state and processes within the state, specifically, conditions and processes which enable normal functioning of state and development (Todorović & Trifunović, 2020, p. 11). Security Science aspires to establish a national interest as an important analytical tool for understanding national security because, as Simić notes, "national security is an irreducible core of national interest" (Simić, 2002, p. 32). Theoretically, the concept of national security is an invention of a realistic school of thought, although other approaches take this concept, analyzing it from a different angle or basing their understanding on its negation. The constant of realistic analysis is the view that even when a state is not in conflict with another state, the nature of international politics is conflicting. States can only secure their interests by increasing their power or joining alliances (balance of power). As survival is the supreme interest, so we come to a realistic view of national security, which represents the core of national interest, and the main feature is the increase of power.

For a better understanding of the national interest in Security Science, it is necessary to consider national security policy. As a part of the state policy, the national security policy derives from the strategic-doctrinal documents of the state, ie it represents a concretization of the national security strategy. It can be understood as "the skill of management or the activity of the highest holders of political power which regulates the issues of establishing, preserving and improving national security at all levels, so the national security system is a political-institutional, normative and operational instrument in implementing security policy" (Stajić, 2017, p.1335). By determining the national security policy, the state not only determines the planned

direction of activities of all elements of the national security system but also opts for the concept of security. National security policy can also be understood as a prudent state policy of promoting national interests based on the preservation of national identity. For states that do not have great potentials for power, the meaning of politics is based on achieving and preserving internal stability, and policy-making is conditioned by the established balance of interests of the great powers and political articulation and protection of national interests.

In other words, a realistic understanding of the national interest as a key driver, but also a determinant of the behavior of states concerning other states, is still relevant today. All states aspire to realize the basic national interest which arises from the teachings of the realists and which forms the core of the national interest, that is, the physical survival of the state itself. Following the factors of the internal and external environment, such as political, economic, military, cultural, historical, and other factors, states define other interests as well. For future research of national interest in the science of security, the understandings of realists remain the basis, which needs to be upgraded with the understandings of other schools of thought. The goal is to explore the internal dimension in addition to the external dimension of security. In this way, the question of how the state should articulate the internal dimension, ie how to maintain the internal dimension and establish a stable system, will be considered through a comprehensive approach.

CONCLUSION

The differences in perceptions that exist among realists are perhaps best illustrated by their understanding of the national interest. Thus, Morgentau perceived the national interest as objective and amenable to detection through realistic analyzes. Neorealists, on the other hand, most often see national interest (outside the minimum requirements for preserving sovereignty and territorial integrity) as subjective and outside theory, rather than the subject of examination or analysis (Donnelly, 2000: 31). Also, realists are generally distinguished by the idea of what should be achieved through the national interest: for Morgentau it is power, for Aron the pleasure of the state and, for Waltz the

survival of the state. Although haven't all realists paid attention to the concept of national interest in their theoretical considerations, realism contributed to the understanding, development, and actualization of this concept in at least two ways: 1) under realism theorists who positioned it at the center of their thinking and improved this concept; 2) theorists (often representatives of other directions) who, by criticizing the national interest, sought to show the superiority of their thinking, thus pointing out the weaknesses of this approach, upgrading it and further explaining it.

The efforts of realists to shed light on the notion of national interest are also very significant from the aspect of Security Science. National interest, at its core understood in the light of realism, is one of the important concepts of this science and is part of the conceptual apparatus. Without understanding the national interest, it is not possible to research national security, because there is a high degree of interdependence between these two directly correlated concepts. The higher level of national security is the state capacity to pursue national interests is better. The realization of national interests, whether they are the state's survival, the preservation/increase of power and prestige, or economic well-being, contributes to increasing national security. In Security Science, the national interest is a quality analytical tool that, from a concept from the corpus of political fashion and a vague catchphrase, has become a framework that provides guidelines for assessing the security policies of the state. In that way, decision-makers are reminded that conducting an active and smart security policy necessarily implies prudent articulation of the national interests of the state.

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