Mariano Aguirre is the Director of the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution, NOREF, Norway. An analyst and writer on international politics with particular expertise on the Middle East, Latin America and US foreign policy he has a Master Degree on Peace Studies from the Trinity College (Dublin). Author and editor of several books he is an international commentator and contributor to different international media and journals. Mr. Aguirre has received different international awards, the last one in 2014 by the Autonomous University of Lisbon for his career as defender of peace and human rights.

Limits to political realism facing global challenges

Mariano Aguirre

The international system faces challenges that require governments and international organizations to react in previously unexplored areas, such as international organized crime, the intense environmental crisis and the increasing unconventional violence carried out by non-governmental armed groups and radicalized individuals. Moreover, governments, international financial organizations and the European Union have responded with an aggressive economic realism to the financial and economic crisis that began in 2007 and affected particularly the United States and Europe. Global society faces other structural problems such as unemployment of large masses of young people, violent radicalization, migration and urban sprawl. The complexity of each of these issues and the linkages between them require political actors to avoid simplistic and short-term solutions based on ideological prejudices.

However, the responses of governments and security and financial organizations are characterized by being essentially *realistic*, and sometimes *aggressively realistic*. The argument that justifies their actions is that decision-makers allege to acknowledge "the world as it is" and "not as it should be." There is no time, they say, or room for "experiments" and "extravagances". This means that the frame of reference and economic security paradigm that has guided their policies since at least the end of World War II will not be broken.

Deregulation and inequality

In the field of economics, it is about the continuity of the liberal economic model, in which the role of the State in the management and regulation of the economy is diminished, there is increasing privatization, greater emphasis on speculative financial investments in the productive sector of goods, structural reforms that involve deep cuts in governmental social services (education, health, housing, transport), promotion of free competition (and subcontracting) at all levels of economic activity along with liberalization of employment and crackdown on union activities. Job insecurity becomes a permanent state.

Despite the signs derived from the recent financial crisis, the dominant economic model continues to rely on deregulation and lack of state control over the global financial movements. The recent revelations of the so-called *Panama papers* and other investigations show the diverse and intricate forms of massive tax evasion, covert investments, purchase of real estate through shell corporations and fictitious companies and other means that allow sectors with greater economic power to not contribute to the common good, detracting funds from countries and societies and to illegally accumulate more non-productive wealth. [1]

There are two technological factors that will generate more marginalization, social exclusion and, possibly, violent responses. First, automation that replaces human labor. Second, the use of artificial intelligence applied to control and planning systems, which will also displace many senior and middle managers of business administration. When technological advances are not considered a common good, they are used for the benefit of the private production of goods and the administrative management. The massive elimination of human jobs has serious consequences in developed economies with a more or less developed welfare state system. Yet the burden on social protection systems will be difficult to maintain, especially by having fewer workers contributing to their future pensions. But in the South (meaning in general less developed) the impact will be devastating. A study authored by US-based Citi bank and the Oxford Martin School, a research and policy arm of the University of Oxford, based on World Bank data indicates that:

"(A)ll jobs in Ethiopia, and more than half of those in Angola, Mauritius, South Africa and Nigeria could be taken over by automation, according to an incisive new study, throwing a big spanner in continent's hopes of manufacturing its way into prosperity. This is because the majority of jobs in those countries are either low-skilled or in industries highly susceptible to computers and robots, including the continent's mainstay agriculture. The study (…) finds that 85% of jobs in Ethiopia are at risk of being automated from a pure technological viewpoint, the highest proportion of any country globally". [2]

---

[1] https://theintercept.com/2016/04/05/heres-the-price-countries-pay-for-tax-evasion-exposed-in-panama-papers/

[2] http://mgafrica.com/article/2016-01-28-look-away-ethiopia-south-africa-and-nigeria-the-robots-are-coming-for-your-jobs

Data regarding the number of jobs likely to be replaced in other countries is also very grave: 77% in China, 72% in Thailand, 67% in South Africa, 85% in the US, 35% in the UK, and 65% in Argentina.[3]

A manifesto of US scientists, including Stephen Hawkins, warns that despite the great advantages that automation and artificial intelligence generate when applied to fields such as medicine and communication, it is necessary that science be at the service of people and not for the benefit of a minority. According to a study by the Boston Consulting Group, by 2025 machines will have replaced 25% of the productive tasks that people perform today[4]. This growing incorporation of robots replacing jobs has a deep relationship with inequality. The so-called 1% of world population is less accountable to any state and has the ability to produce more, invest and manage funds globally, accumulate more wealth and power and use less human labor[5].

The need to maintain the economic and financial system running without altering the power of the elite (the so-called 1%), and the great speed at which the operations of financial markets move leads to discarding all rationality or logic that defies the conventional thought on the economy[6]. The result of the adjustment policies is a dramatic increase in inequality, increased profits for the 1%, which, in turn, is subject to less regulation and restructuring of labor markets that accentuate the above trends. Aggressive Realism within the framework of hyper-globalization[7] has worked to maintain the privileges and the model running, but not to favor most citizens. Added to that, economists such as Larry Summers predict that in the future we will live in "conditions of secular stagnation – low interest rates, below target inflation, and sluggish output growth."[8]

If global wealth is depicted in a pyramid, in the bottom there will be multiple manifestations of lack of access to jobs and services, with permanent and increasingly dramatic situations of masses of people trying to advance as economic trends reject them, as happens today with refugees. The grievance between the super rich and poor will generate more illegal forms of economic survival, intermediaries and exploitation of the poor against the poor, disaffection towards the State and various forms of violent responses, both organized and unorganized.

Examples are numerous and various: children on the streets of Istanbul selling fake lifejackets to migrants who are crossing to Greece; People who live from collecting

---

3   "Au boulot les robots!", Courier International, number 1346, August 18, 2016, p. 37.

4   Daniel Mendelsohn, **"The Robots Are Winning!"**, The New York Review of Books, June 4, 2015. http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/06/04/robots-are-winning/

5   Sue Halpern, **"How Robots & Algorithms Are Taking Over"**, The New York Review of Books, April 2, 2015. http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/04/02/how-robots-algorithms-are-taking-over/

6   Among the wide literature on alternative policies to those undertaken by the International European Commission, the World Bank and the Monetary Fund see Stuart Holland, Europe in question, Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 2015. Also Joseph Stiglitz, "Seven changes needed to save the Euro and the EU", https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/aug/22/seven-changes-needed-to-save-the-euro-and-the-eu?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Email

7   Martin Jacques, **"The death on neoliberalism and the crisis in Western politics "**, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/21/death-of-neoliberalism-crisis-in-western-politics?CMP=fb_gu

8   http://larrysummers.com/2016/04/28/secular-stagnation-in-the-open-economy/

garbage in cities like Manila or Managua; smugglers of immigrants and refugees, and women from Africa and Russia and Eastern Europe for prostitution chains; the terrible working conditions in factories in Asia or Central American countries; the exploited peasants at the bottom of the drug trafficking networks; hundreds of thousands of people living in slavery conditions; or the masses of young people in the Middle East who have had their democratic expectations frustrated in recent years, among many other examples.

The crisis has shown the lack of judgment and foresight on the management of national and international finances. Economists and politicians in executive and middle management positions have clung to the neoliberal realist paradigm with the conviction that there are no alternatives to their policies, while benefitting through legal and in many cases illegal practices (corruption) that affect both state and private sectors. A belief reinforced by the huge profits they have earned and continue to earn. *Fortune* business magazine noted in 2013:

 "Income inequality has been a problem for decades, but the gap between the haves and have-nots has worsened in the years following the recession. The rise in home and stock prices may be benefitting the richest Americans, but the poorest are being left behind: From 2009 to 2012, the top 1% incomes grew by 31.4% while the bottom 99% incomes grew a mere 0.4%, according to an updated study by University of California Berkeley economists Emmanuel Saez and Thomas Piketty".[9]

Real security?

In the field of security, Realism bases its theory on the defence of the interests of the State as a superior entity. The State's interest is defended through military and non-military power (economic, diplomatic, cultural influence). According to this school of thought, peace in the international system is achieved through the balance of power between countries. This involves prioritizing traditional defence systems (the armed forces with a regular modernization of its weapons systems) as instruments of strategic principles (balance of power in face of potential enemies and deterrence) to ensure national and international security.

These economical-financial and security reference frameworks are projected in many areas at domestic and international levels. For example, international development cooperation is increasingly subordinated to the interests of donor states. Promoting the development of countries and societies affected by underdevelopment and State weakness is replaced by actions to ensure the stability of State investments and foreign companies or more generally to promote regional stability with the geopolitical objective of ensuring the influence of the North or developing countries (e.g., China in sub-Saharan Africa). Some authors argue that even the industry of cooperation serves more as a mechanism of profit than of help for poor countries. The development expert David Sogge notes:

---

[9] "The rich got a lot richer since the financial crisis", Fortune, 11 de September, 2013. Ver Thomas Piketty, Capital in the Twenty-first Century, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 2014; and Tim di Muzio, The 1% and the rest of us, Zed Press, London, 2015.

"There can be little doubt that helping oneself that is, providing benefits to interests within one´s own political economy is for donors a central pursuit indeed it may a central purpose. In contrast to its many elusive quests in its downstream realms, foreign aid has met considerable success in its downstream realms payoffs for interests based in donor countries help explain why the foreign aid system continues to grow despite its lack of success in promoting far better-known goals such as equitable growth and good governance. The foreign aid system continues moving its policies, goods and services downstream toward poorer places while at the same time casting an indulgent eye on large amounts of money and other resources moving upstream to richer places". [10]

A turn from cooperative multilateralism to aggressive realism can also be verified in refugee policies. The number of refugees in 2016 reached an all time high[11]. The international system in this field was governed by cooperative, liberal and multilateral guidelines, which ensured the protection of refugees according to international conventions on asylum and refuge. However, asylum is being redefined from the humanitarian realm to the realm of security. [12]

Policies for receiving refugees and immigrants (an increasingly difficult difference to establish because millions of people emigrate due to similar unbearable conditions or due to violent conflicts) are increasingly aimed at deterring their arrival in Europe, the United States, Australia and other countries. The policies are based on prioritizing the perceived safety of "our country", trying to maintain a national identity against the "others" and trying to protect, despite data that deny it, citizens from the scarcity of jobs seized by refugees and immigrants[13].

Some governments, political leaders and racist organizations in the United States, Europe and other parts of the world promote the perception of threat regarding people from the South and East. However, there is also a strong rejection of asylum-seekers and refugees and immigrants within countries of the South, as is the case of South Africa regarding immigrants from Mozambique, the rejection of the Rohingya minority from Myanmar in various countries of Southeast Asia[14] and the growing criminalization of Latin American immigrants in Argentina[15].

National interests prevail over the general interests of society as a whole also on the issue of climate change. Despite some progress that has been made in agreements on

---

[10] David Sogge, **"Donors Helping Themselves"**, copy edited draft April 2015 https://www.academia.edu/8699720/Donors_Helping_Themselves Final version published in B. Mak Arvin (Ed), Handbook on the Economics of Foreign Aid, Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton, 2015, pp. 280-304.

[11] http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html

[12] Gallya Lahav, **"The global challenge of the refugee exodus"**, Current History, January 2016.

[13] Mariano Aguirre, **"The dilemmas of migration and the alternatives"**, https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/mariano-aguirre/dilemmas-and-alternatives-to-migration

[14] https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2015/10/southeast-asia-persecuted-rohingya-refugees-from-myanmar-suffer-horrific-abuses-at-sea/

[15] http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1745247-mitos-y-realidades-sobre-los-inmigrantes-que-viven-en-la-argentina

reducing polluting gases emissions[16], most governments (as representatives of business sectors) are reluctant to sign international agreements that reduce their industrial production capacities (including the application of intensive exploration techniques in the agricultural sector) and profit in the short and medium terms. The consequences that their policies have on the environment in the long run are denied or neglected on the grounds of the need to be part of a highly competitive global market. Once again, a short term realist vision against a strategic one.

The last State of the Climate report

"confirmed that 2015 surpassed 2014 as the warmest year since at least the mid-to-late 19th century. The record heat resulted from the combined influence of long-term global warming and one of the strongest El Niño events the globe has experienced since at least 1950. Most indicators of climate change continued to reflect trends consistent with a warming planet. Several markers, such as land and ocean temperatures, sea levels, and greenhouse gases, broke records set just one year prior".[17]

As for the relation between climate change and violent conflicts, environmental degradation is causing shortages of food resources, reduction of arable land, competition for resources among communities (eg. Syrian refugees are seen as competition by populations in Lebanon and Jordan, which accelerates ethnic tensions) and growing demands by social groups towards their governments[18].

Specifically in the field of security, as of September 2001 the dominant paradigm of aggressive realism practiced by various governments has led to responding with force to problems and challenges that are rooted in poverty, marginalization, political repression, resource depletion and other causes. As Professor Paul Rogers suggests,

 "(…) although ISIS is certainly a major security problem, the real drivers of current global insecurity are quite different: deepening socio-economic divisions, which lead to the relative marginalization of most people across the world, and the prospect of profound and lasting environmental constraints, caused by climate change. ISIS, in short, should be seen as a warning of what could be to come, not as a fundamental trend in its own right".[19]

Schools and reality

In the development of International Relations (IR), or the history of the relations between modern sovereign states, a number of theories represented by schools of thought have been established. Braillard defines an international relations theory as

---

[16] http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php

[17] https://www.climate.gov/news-features/features/2015-state-climate-highlights#wows1_3

[18] https://dansmithsblog.com/2015/04/22/climate-change-and-security-heres-the-analysis-whens-the-action/

[19] Paul Rogers, **Irregular war. ISIS and the new threat from the margins**, I.B. Tauris, London, 2016, p.5.

"a consistent and systematic set of proposals designed to illuminate the field of social relations that we call international. One such theory presents an explanatory diagram of these relationships, its structure, evolution, and especially updates its determinants. Based on it, one can also predict the future development of these relations, or at least clarify certain tendencies of that evolution. The theory may also clarify facts. Like any theory, it implies a selection and organization of data, and some construction of knowledge". [20]

The replication, dissemination and adaptation of a theory take place within social circuits. Politicians, journalists, the military, government bureaucracy, private sector, churches, and organizations of civil society act deliberately and consciously or by inertia, according to theories, often mixing elements of several of them.

While there are different conceptualizations there is a general academic agreement that the main schools that define the spectrum are realism, liberalism and idealism. During the twentieth century, these schools have had different academic ramifications but in this text we refer only to these three.

Political Realism believes that "politics, like society in general is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature"[21]. Realism suggests that relations between States are based on interest and not on ideology; peace is achieved through the balance of power between States. Even great powers can coexist despite having different values and beliefs. There is no superior entity to which they are accountable. Ultimately their relations are ruled by war.

With these principles, Realism has become the predominant vision and practice in state policies due to its apparent practical recognition of how they work and relate. At the same time, it is a classical theory, with a long tradition that comes from Thucydides (460-406 BC), Niccolo Machiavelli (1549-1527), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712- 1778)[22]. Even though the different schools refer to specific policies they have a profound philosophical background and perception of the world. British theoretical Martin Wight said in 1950 that there were "three schools": *the Machiavellian or Realists, the Grotians or Rationalists and the Kantians or Revolutionaries.*

Realists believe that there is no superior entity to the State and that the State has, as human nature, selfish interests. They are skeptical about the idea of building an international society and in the face of international law and multilateralism embodied by the United Nations. The world is anarchic and peace is maintained through the balance of power, particularly of the great powers. The realistic politician is distrustful by nature. War is, in some cases, a result and a necessary factor to rearrange the

[20]   Philippe Braillard, **Théorie des relations internationales**, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1997, pp. 15-16.

[21]   Hans J. Morgenthau, **Politics among nations. The struggle for power and peace (Brief edition),** McGraw.Hill, New York, 1993, p. 4.

[22]   Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt, **"Realism"**, in John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (Eds.), The globalization of world politics, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, p. 100.

power between States. Governments must ensure the survival of the State by all possible means. Regarding ethics, it must rule within each State, and the superior interest for peace is maintained precisely by recognizing that "the world is as it is." Therefore, a well-managed balance of power leads to peace. For that reason, some theorists and politicians argue that realism has an ethics of peace.

Grotians or Rationalists (also called liberals) believe that States relate to each other but are not intended to confrontation in order to defend their interests. This can be achieved through cooperation with established practical relations (particularly trade) and rules of international law in a framework of values that include order, freedom, justice and tolerance. These are instruments to combat the lawlessness and anarchy realists accept as a fact of nature[23]. It is legitimate to defend the interests of each State but it must be done according to rules and regulations.

The Kantian or Revolutionaries (also called idealists) reject the confrontation of the Realists and the Grotian's cooperation based on the law, and propose the creation of a community that is guided by cultural and moral standards, in which democratic States make up a community with legal obligations, which does not currently exist, of States living in "perpetual peace"[24].

Studies of international relations have generated various classifications, with a tendency to unify the Grotians and the Kantians in a single stream which considers that the relationship between States can be ruled through institutions, law and regimes (eg. the international regime on human rights) that are generated through a process of negotiations. At the same time, other theories have emerged on how to interpret the relationship between States, and between States and different actors in the international system, such as multilateral organizations, civil society and the global media.

Since the 1970s increasing scientific knowledge and social awareness of global problems that have no solution without cooperation between States and societies have given way to different critical perspectives towards Realism. British scholar Ken Booth, who is in favor of an "emancipatory realism», considers that Realism is not up to the complexity and needs of global society. According to this author, Realism

 "is not realistic (it does not provide an accurate picture of the world); it is a misnomer (it is an ideology masquerading as a theory of knowledge); it is a static theory (without a theory of change); it is reductive (it leaves out much of the picture); its methodology is unsophisticated (it sacrifices richness for efficiency of explanation); it fails the test of practice (it does not offer a reliable recipe book); its unspoken assumptions are regressive (it leaves no space for gender or class); its agenda is narrow (it over-concentrates on the military dimension to the exclusion of other threats); its ethics are hostile to the human interest (by placing the "cold monster" of the state at

---

23   Tim Dunne, **"Liberalism"**, in Baylis, Smith and Owens (Eds.), p. 115.

24   Martin Wight, **International theory. The three traditions**, Leicester University Press and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1994, pp. IX-XX and p.7-8.

the centre); and it is intellectually rigid (its proponents have marginalized or silenced other approaches)". [25]

Warnings on environmental sustainability[26] have been followed by studies and appeals from the United Nations, some Government leaders and civil society to build a common future based on the protection of human rights, rights of women, children and the elderly, communications, refugees, sharing technology and scientific knowledge, international organized crime and prevention and treatment of epidemics and pandemics.

In the field of war and peace, liberals and idealists promote different collective security mechanisms. The Machiavellian or Realists are not against agreements but prioritize the State's interests. Virtually all countries in the world are part of the United Nations, but many refuse to sign and ratify agreements that limit their action. For example, the United States is not part of the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court (ICC).

These "halfway" policies between realism and liberalism/idealism are part of government's practice, particularly democratic governments. In the field of defence of human rights and democracy, various Western governments, for example, have advocated for some causes but remain indifferent to others. Between rhetoric and practice in fields such as humanitarian interventionism, Governments tend to be biased, realistic and conservative[27], especially after experiencing several failures. The same tension arises in the European Union, which promotes a series of normative values in its foreign policy that are, however, offset by bilateral policies of several member states, for example regarding relations with authoritarian governments and the arms trade[28].

In recent years there has been a reappraisal of Morgenthau's theories, considered one of the greatest theorists of Realism, indicating that this trend "is thus more than a static, amoral theory (...) It is a practical theory that depends on the actual historical and political conditions, and is ultimately judged by its ethical standards and by its relevance in making prudent political decisions (...) However, when it becomes a dogmatic enterprise, realism fails to perform its proper function" turning into "an ideology" to "justify aggression"[29].

---

[25]   Ken Booth, **Theory of world security**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 35-36.

[26]   El primer y muy importante informe fue producido por el Club de Roma http://www.clubofrome.org/report/the-limits-to-growth/

[27]   Simon Jenkins, **Mission accomplished? The crisis of international intervention**, I.B. Tauris, London, 2015.

[28]   Mariano Aguirre, **"Europa y la seguridad internacional. El caso de los cambios en el mundo árabe y Oriente Próximo"**, en Impacto de la crisis en el proyecto europeo, Fundación Seminario de Investigación para la Paz/Mira Editores, Zaragoza, 2015, p. 212.

[29]   "Political Realism in International Relations", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2013, p. 15. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-intl-relations/

The War on Terror

In the field of peace and security, since the end of World War II, liberalism and idealism have promoted the strengthening of multilateral organizations, particularly the United Nations, the redirection to development of funds that were dedicated to defence and the establishment of mechanisms for conflict prevention. Especially in the 1990s there were several important initiatives, such as the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict and by the European Union[30]. However, after the attacks of September 2001 these initiatives were marginalized by the so-called "War on Terror" led by the United States and Great Britain. A hardliner Realism since occupies almost all the political space intended for security having become this "aggressive ideology".

The response of the governments of the United States, Great Britain and other allies to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington in 2001 was to launch the so-called "war on terror". Washington defined terrorism as an enemy made up of various organizations and individuals, with multiple ramifications, without a specific state basis and therefore without conventional armed forces. This enemy, the narrative goes, is supposed not to be governed by rules and does not respect international laws of war or international humanitarian laws.

Given these characteristics, the United States, Great Britain and other countries were involved in a multi-featured offensive: war on leaders and regimes accused of supporting terrorism (Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the government of the Taliban in Afghanistan) in order to change their regimes for democratic governments; sanctions, cyber warfare and other forms of pressure against the government of Iran; elimination and/or capture of individuals considered terrorists; detention without legal safeguards and procedures and for an indefinite period of time of suspected terrorists in illegitimate prisons (in US bases like Guantanamo); practice and attempts to legitimize the use of torture as a method of interrogation of suspected terrorists; avoidance of rules of international law, international humanitarian law and rules on prisoners of war through illegal and secret movements between countries that cooperate with detention and torture of individuals.

These initiatives taken by the government of George W. Bush and supported enthusiastically by then Prime Minister Tony Blair, with the collaboration of a long list of rulers, were implemented in parallel to forcing the intelligence to adapt their reports to the objectives of the war on terror, and not the other way around. Thus, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the MI5 confirmed that Saddam Hussein had nuclear weapons, although information from the United Nations and independent analysts indicated that its nuclear capability had been eliminated by sanctions and international control in previous years.[31]

---

[30] https://www.carnegie.org/media/filer_public/b2/0e/b20e1080-7830-4f2b-9410-51c14171809b/ccny_report_1997_ccpdc_final.pdf;   http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/policies/fragility-and-crisis-management/links-between-security-and-development_en

[31] The Report of the Iraq Inquire, London, 2016. http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/the-report/ Also see Andrew J. Bacevich, Washington rules. America´s path to permanent war, Metropolitan books, New York, 2010; Zbigniew Brzezinski, Second

Regarding international agreements, such as the Convention on Torture, which the United States is part of and has ratified, scholars and officials developed studies redefining the concept of "torture" and indicating that the war on terror-and the fact that terrorists qualify as "non-Combatants" or citizens of no State- enable the country to be exempted from complying with the agreements due to a type of legal exception state.[32]

The intervention in Afghanistan (since 2001) and the war in Iraq (since 2003 with extensions that carry on until today) were the beginning of a downward trend in the international system. Climate change, the fight against drug trafficking, the millennium development goals, the prevention of armed conflicts through cooperation policies, refugees reception and dialogue with religious and political Islam were relegated or eliminated. Security became the priority. Massive resources were derived from other fields to strengthen security systems and create massive intelligence systems (and social control of citizens). Those regressive steps were noted not only in the channeling of resources for security but in the budget cuts for social services. In fact, the US military budget grew while its European allies did not respond to Washington's pressure. However, a climate of *securitization* was created.

The policies carried out by the governments of the United States and Great Britain, and supported by several others, in the case of the war in Iraq, contradicted the "prudence" that Morgenthau predicted. Moreover, Washington's policies in the case of Iraq, Afghanistan and previously in Vietnam were guided by an aggressive realism based on flawed analysis and partial readings of reality. At the same time, a superficial, patronizing and racist "idealism" was practiced. This "idealism" was promoted by the group of intellectuals and diplomats known as "the neoconservatives", who believed that they could change regimes without understanding or respecting the internal affairs of countries, in which they intervened. However, in all situations there were strong realistic components such as associating US credibility with military force, the supposed ability to prevent a number of countries from falling under the influence of communism (the domino theory), and the balance of power between the great powers.

As Gordon M. Goldstein shows in his study about the US involvement in Vietnam, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations´ policies were driven by ideas firmly entrenched in Cold War ideology. The theory, for example, aligned countries without taking into account their histories or present realities, and argued that if one domino were to fall, it would start a chain reaction in other countries in the region. And the credibility factor, which held that the strongest power in the world was simply not capable of losing a war. And finally, there was the global war against communism in the 1950s and 1960s, which failed to anticipate the vigorous nationalism behind many insurrections, from Cuba to Vietnam.[33]

---

change. Three presidents and the crisis of American superpower, Basic Books, New York, 2007.

[32] David Luban, **"The defence of torture"**, The New York Review of Books, March 15, 2007 http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2007/03/15/the-defence-of-torgue/ ; Keneth Roth et al (Eds.), Torture. Does it make us safer? Is it ever OK?, The New Press and Human Rights Watch, New York, 2005; Sanford Levinson (Ed), Torture. A collection, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004.

[33] Mariano Aguirre, **"Pernicious parallels. US war policy from Vietnam to Afghanistan"**, The Broker, December 6, 2010.

The simplistic use of force and the idea that authoritarian regimes supported by identity-alliances could be quickly replaced by Western-style forms of government collapsed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Force replaced dialogue and understanding of the reality of other contexts and cultures. The United States and its allies have paid a high price for not understanding local conditions. A price that extends to the radicalization of various sectors and has led to the creation of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS).

Identities and complexity

The preponderance of ethnic, racial and religious identities in various international conflicts, and the fact that most armed conflicts are now occurring within countries rather than between them, is posing problems to Realism. This school acknowledges nationalism and identity as powerful factors. For realists, confrontations within States that collapse (the Balkans, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Libya, etc.) are due to the same rationale of conflicts of interest (economic, political, of identity) similar to those of States when fighting against each other. The anarchy that governs the international system is projected, in these cases, to the State's domestic realm.

But political agendas of organizations like al-Qaeda and ISIS and the conflicts in Syria and Iraq do not allow an easy understanding of the concept of *interest*. In the case of al-Qaeda, there is a dual strategy of millenarian vision and the fight against corrupt local authorities and their imperial allies. This concept goes beyond State control while ISIS seeks to conquer territories and build a State (Caliphate) from which to extend its actions[34]. In Syria, additionally, dozens of armed groups fight along different agendas, redefined themselves, establishing flexible alliances and, in many cases, overlapping interests of local control with crime, setting up a complex political economy of war. At the same time, a number of regional powers (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey) and global powers (US and Russia) interact and influence the dynamics of the war from a classic realistic perspective[35]. Once again, these types of challenges require more sophisticated analysis and answers than a conventional approach to the concept of interest and the use of force as the leading response.

As skeptics towards multicultural states, something consistent with the idea of defending national interests, realists believe that the solution to the armed conflict caused by matters of identity is the partition of the disputed territories[36]. The partition was the solution imposed by the US to the Balkan war in 1990, and some analysts propose it for Iraq, Yemen and Syria. This is, however, an idea rejected by critics of artificially established borders (something the colonial Realism did frequently in Africa, Asia and the Middle East) that do not respect the diversity of identities and help consolidate elites that dominate their own communities[37].

---

http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/Articles/Pernicious-parallels See Gordon M. Goldstein, Lessons in disaster. McGeorge Bundy and the path to war in Vietnam, Holt, New York, 2008,

[34] Patrick Cockburn, **The rise of the Islamic State**, Verso Books, London, 2015.

[35] Marc Lynch, **The new Arab wars**, PublicAffairs, New York, 2016.

[36] Dunne and Schmidt, p. 102.

[37] Bassel F. Salloukh et al., **The politics of sectarianism in postwar Lebanon**, Pluto Press, London, 2015.

The radicalization of individuals in the name of Islam in Europe and the United States also represents a serious challenge to the type of answers given by rulers. The reasons for radicalization are related to the socio-economic marginalization, extreme readings of religious texts, resentment against Northern countries' colonialism and policies in the Middle East and North Africa, among other factors. A simplistic analysis leads to military responses that do not favor the understanding of reasons for violent radicalization and its prevention. The terrorist attacks in France and Belgium in 2015 and 2016 were carried out by men of Arab origin living in Europe. The governments of Paris and Brussels responded by bombing ISIS' positions in Syria, affecting the civilian population. Beyond the symbolism to show that there is "a response", these force policies apparently aimed at defending national security end up acting contrastively, stripping States that execute them of legitimacy and generating more conflict.

Conclusion

The dominant trend of aggressive realism with limited ethical considerations needs to be moderated by policies based on international law, which respond to democratic pressure from civil society and seek inspiration in schools of thought that promote cooperation, conflict prevention and rules that govern the relationship between States. Of the Realism theorized by Morgenthau and other classical realists we should rescue the recommendation that it should be "aware of the moral significance of political action". Political decisions "must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place". Moreover, politicians should weigh their decisions considering "universal moral principles". In consequence,

 "(T)here can be no political morality without prudence; that is, without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action. Realism, then, considers prudence –the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions—to be the supreme virtue in politics".[38]

Prudence in decision-making will be necessary in an international system that is moving towards a complex multi-polarity. As Kupchan suggests, "(A) global order, if it emerges, will be an amalgam of diverse political cultures and competing conceptions of domestic and international order".[39] A deeper interpretation of prudence shows the need to have deep knowledge of the societies we are dealing with in conflictive and cooperative environments. Even further, Western powers should take into consideration the colonial historical background and the impact of their present actions (for example, supporting local dictators for the sake of realist "stability" or bombardments in areas as the Middle East).

The (realistic) predictions that the international system will be led by a single power or that it will move towards a homogeneously liberal world are not being met. The United States is a power in deep internal crisis, increasing delegitimization and

---

[38]   Morgenthau, p. 12.

[39]   Charles A. Kupchan, **No one´s world**, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012, p. 3.

declining international influence. Moreover, the international system has a complexity, which is not receiving a "convergence towards a common framework of values," according to Root. On the contrary, "(t)he growing economic interconnectedness is establishing new norms of optimal governance based on growing diversity between the West and newly rising powers[40]".

Two other predictions have not been met either. Firstly, that globalization and the power of multinational corporations would displace the State. Despite losing power, the State remains a central actor to regulate internal and external relations. In emerging countries, along with Russia and China, the State leads the process of industrialization and international affairs. Secondly, that democracy as the State's system of political management would expand as a result of development of societies. The reality is that authoritarianism, and in some cases demagogic authoritarianism, occupies a political spot with high social legitimacy.

Ultimately, if Realism claims to make a practical and strict reading of reality, then global challenges and the complexity of the global system cannot be ignored, including the ethical implications involved for present and future generations. In the words of Habermas on global powers but that can be applied to all rulers "(T)ey have to be willing to broaden their perspectives on what counts as the "national interest" into a viewpoint of "global governance". This change would need to occur "in the governing elites" jointly with a transformation of "value orientations of their electorates"[41].

---

[40]   Hilton L. Root, **Dynamics among nations**, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2013, p.1 and pp. 210-235.

[41]   Jürgen Habermas, **The postnational constellation**, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 111-112.