

Q. Discuss the concept of Idealism. Explain its core perceptions and define its agenda of peace for the stability of world.

## Ans Introduction

Idealism, which is also known as liberalism, is an <sup>theoretical</sup> approach in ~~Inter~~ the field of International Relations (IR). In other words, it provides an ideal lense to see the world from liberal perspectives, which are based on moral and ethical values. Idealism is diametrically opposed with the theory of realism. Realism focusses more on power and security in terms of power while idealism looks for opportunities for peace and development of the world. Idealism, though could be traced back centuries ago, came to light in early 1920s when the tragic, disastrous World War One ended in 1918, and this was classified as classical idealism. The inter-war periode and then the outbreak of the World War two in 1939 questioned ~~the~~ <sup>its</sup> acceptability. ~~Noneth.~~ Nonetheless, during the Cold War, liberalism again strengthened its position and this time, it was called Neo-liberalism. This discussion will delve deep into the concept of idealism, its core perceptions and its agenda of peace for the stability of the world.

## Definition of idealism:

Idealism is a theoretical approach in the field of international relations that focuses on peace and development of the world by cooperation and interdependence of states through international institutions and international law. Idealism is the philosophy behind liberalism, which pursues liberal values.

It pushes towards the development of an ideal state to live in. For this, it promotes the idea of moral and ethical values. Further, it argues that human beings are rational and by applying this rationality, cooperations could be achieved, natural harmony of interests could be achieved and war and conflicts could be eliminated. Political idealism is a set of ideas that together oppose war and advocate the reform of international community through moral values and through the development of international institutions and laws.

Idealism can be classified into two school of thoughts, one being classical idealism and the second another being Neo-liberalism.

## Classical liberalism:

As stated earlier, classical liberalism or

idealism came to the fore of international discourse in 1920s with the culmination of WWI. It is considered the first dominant theory in International Relations, emerging during the first debate. The 28<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, Woodrow Wilson, advocated the theory by giving the idea of establishing "an international institution to bolster cooperations among the nations. In his own words, "Peaceful coexistence of the international community is possible through promotion of democracy and self determination and through creation of international institutions."

### Neo-liberalism:

Neo-liberalism is an advanced state of the classical liberalism. It emerged during the 3<sup>rd</sup> debate in Inter IR in 1970s. Though in opposition to the emergence of neo-realism, it fostered the concept of liberalism by giving few new directions. Though the core ideas of classical and neo-liberalism are same, the neo latter one is more dubious about a world in which countries retain full sovereignty. Neo-liberalists believe that countries are so inter-connected and interdependent that they sometimes have to surrender their sovereignty to international organizations to promote and maintain greater cooperations. Further, Neo-liberals accepts the

presence  
concept of international anarchy. However, they argue that this not anarchic structure, <sup>is due to</sup> complex structure of interconnectedness and can be eliminated by furthering the interdependence through trade and economic, social and other exchanges, thereby limiting war and conflict. Therefore, retaining the core ideas of classical realism, neo-liberalism <sup>has</sup> further advanced the theory of liberalism.

### Core perceptions

The core part of idealism has following key points.

#### Nature of human being:

About the nature of human, idealism maintains fairly positive of human. Liberalists argue that human beings are altruistic, optimistic and rational. By ~~using~~ <sup>applying</sup> this rationality to international relations, cooperations can be achieved. In this sense, the liberals trace their intellectual lineage to political philosophers, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau who established the concept of Social Contract.

#### Morality:

liberalists argue to follow common moral standard. According to them, <sup>any</sup> behavior considered immoral at an individual level must also be considered immoral ~~at~~ in foreign policy. Foreign policy

should be formulated according to the standards of cooperation and even altruism.

### National interest:

Sidelining the realism's approach towards national interest, liberal school of thought view that all humans have common bond or interest beyond the narrow boundaries of their country. To put it another way, a country's national interest and the common interests of the world are ~~not~~ inextricably tied. Therefore collective approach is needed for collective or shared interests, i.e. development and peace.

### Politics states

liberals maintain an open view toward politics states. They oppose zero-sum game and advocate win-win situation. For this absolute gain, they argue, international cooperations through international organizations are imperative.

### Structure of International System:

Structure of international system is anarchic in terms of complex interdependent structure. The realism's view of anarchy can be overcome by fostering ~~int. coop.~~ cooperations via interconnected trade, social exchanges etc.

## Main Actor

Classical idealists believe that morality at individual level can also be applied at international level. So, classical liberalism is an individual level interpretation of cooperation at state and global. Whereas, neo-liberalism says is state level interpretation of cooperation. Hence, the main actor is states.

Besides these major key areas, liberalism includes nature of conflict; lack of central processes to regulate competitions. Neoliberalism encompasses collective security, legislative approach to deal disputes, and nuclear disarmament to bring peace.

## Agenda of peace for the stability of world

### Institutionalism

By establishing international institutions cooperations can be achieved. Because international institutions act as an arbitrator for any dispute. For example, two countries having conflict over an issue can take it to the third party. Doing this, an incentive of deception is eliminated and thus both sides commit to cooperate & in case either of the party breaches, severe punishment

like sanction is inflicted. In this way the institutions create a 'check' on countries' performances.

### Manifestation of institutionalism

The world saw the League of Nations as the first liberal International Governmental Organization. The purpose of this institution was to build cooperation and avert conflicts in future. This institution was established following the Treaty of Versailles after WWI. The idea was presented for the first time by President Woodrow Wilson.

The League of Nations, however, could not achieve what its founders had assumed. Series of events during inter-war period, including the rise of Hitler's authoritarian regime, Manchurian Crisis in 1931, Ethiopian Crisis 1935, and Economic depression 1929 questioned the very principle of the institution. Further, Hitler violated the peace treaty in 1936 by invading Rhineland. These events led to the failure of the concept of idealism, for the time, giving impetus to realism.

After the WWII, international institutions started to be established. The formation of United Nations followed by World Trade Organization played very effective role in bringing peace. On the ground of these institutions, many international treaties came into existence. Nuclear Proliferation Treaty is one among other. With the passage of time, as the

two superpowers (the US and the Soviet) were engaged in the Cold War, technology boomed, economic activities saw drastic shift, trade i.e imports and exports rose and hence cooperations and interdependence increased. This is how the world became globalized. Due to globalization, the world is in peace, with no major conflict due to interconnectedness. This is how the agenda of peace and stability has been achieved.

Furthermore, <sup>that the</sup> liberalists see morality as a base does not mean they do not use coercion. There are, though, two kinds, one being assertive approach while the other being passive liberalism. Assertive approach is opted when international institution like the UN allows to use coercion against overt international aggressions. For self defence, coercion can be used. History is replete with examples, such as US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and Afghanistan in 2002. On the other hand, passive liberalist argue that using force is often counterproductive and it may also lead to imperial domination.

### Conclusion:

Cooperations, interdependence, morality and human nature with of rationale ~~are~~ provide base for peace and development in the world. Liberal school of thought pursue a common interest of the world. For



that to <sup>to</sup> achieved, international institutions and laws provide the solution. Its core perceptions include nature of human being as altruistic and optimistic, morality being decisive element in the international arena, and state being the primary actor. It has established peace through establishment of international institutions like the UN, WTO, etc while increasing interconnectedness through trade and treaties, making the world a global space to live in peacefully.