From Independence to Hegemony: Early U.S. Foreign Policy

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Introduction

The dominant analysis of International Relations (IR) as a discipline focuses on post-World War One (WWI) policy dynamics using either realism, liberalism, or constructivism as a main analytical lens. Numerous political analysts have either critiqued or championed one of these theories in an attempt to understand our shared historical and political relationships between international systems. However, for a foreign policy theory to hold a predictive nature for policy makers looking to deal with a current or future foreign policy issue, a theory must be applicable not only in a contemporary context, but must also be applicable to a pre-WWI perspective. This is important because there are hundreds of years of IR in the western world prior to WWI, and those policies, perspectives, and actors, influenced the decisions made by later leaders in our modern world. Immanuel Wallerstein intuitively understood this when he described political systems as having "lives" that "...come into existence at some point, which needs to be explained." Wallerstein p.31). Therefore, a symbolically political life will ebb and flow like any other living organism, with a beginning and eventual end, that must anticipate failure, confrontation, friendships, alliances, and economic pressures.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the early foreign policy choices that were made by the United States (U.S.) from its birth of independence to eventually rising to become the current hegemonic state. I will not attempt to synthesize the entire history of U. S. foreign policy goals to concretely claim that the U.S. has effortlessly, or manifestly, become the modern hegemonic power, but to show that as an emerging power after its independence, that there were certain foreign policy choices that created fertile ground for its growing prominence. Of course, a caveat is appropriate here, as there are many world event outcomes that must have fallen into a

positive correlation for the U.S. to become the modern hegemonic state, i.e. WWI and WWII. Nonetheless, the following analysis will focus on early U.S. foreign policy and economic policy choices from a neoclassical realist perspective (NCRP), because it attempts to explain the theoretical gap between a systemic analysis and the perceptions of the actors, elites, and policy makers that shaped domestic and foreign policy decisions.

Realism and the Development of Neoclassical Realism

Realism as a theory has its birth in Thomas Hobbes's: *Leviathan, 1651*. In Chapter XIII, Hobbes argues that "without a common Power to keep them all in awe" mankind will remain in a state of war with one another. This bleak outlook asserts that the "state of war" leaves states without an overarching authority to petition to, and thus the international system is anarchic. However, this perspective/warning was not a new thought. Thucydides Melian Dialogue (416 B.C) lays out the same argument; that without a systemic authority to turn to the Athenians merely took what they wanted from the Melians through the use of violence. Thus, realism as a political theory, relies on the practical matter of conflict as the independent variable and competition as the dependent variable.

There are multiple perspectives on realism. "Classical realists such as Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr believed that states, like human beings, had an innate desire to dominate others, which led them to fight wars" (Walt, p.31). Neorealists such as "...Kenneth Waltz ignored human nature and focused on the effects of the international system. For Waltz, the international system consisted of a number of great powers, each seeking to survive," eventually creating a stable bipolar system of two dominate nation states (Ibid. p. 31). John Mearsheimer pushed this concept further in developing the theory of offensive neorealism. Offensive neorealism's fundamental principle is that due to the prominence of power dynamics within international

systems, that the ultimate goal of every state is to maximize its power and become the sole power in the international system (Mearsheimer, p.1).

However, Gideon Rose recognized the limits of the systemic analysis of realism and adopted an analysis he called neoclassical realism. Neoclassical realism argues that a state's foreign policy is not merely defined by its position in the world and its military strength, but that the influence of power dynamics is complex and indirect. This means that there is no formal link between military power and foreign policy, because elites and political leaders' beliefs and perceptions drive foreign policy, not simple military strength (Rose, p146-147).

With a NCRP an analysis of foreign policy decisions prior, during, and after the U.S. became an independent nation brings forth the following questions. First, how did the perceptions of political elites such as John Adams and Alexander Hamilton shape foreign policy choices prior to and after U.S. independence? Second, how did economic and military independence from England necessitate the strategic foreign policy choice of raising a strong navy? Third, does neoclassical realism actually create a picture of the world that is "closer to the real world" as Gideon Rose claims (Rose, p162)?

U.S Political Independence

On September 3, 1783, the Treaty of Paris formally ended hostility between the U.S. and England and established the U.S. as an independent nation separate from England. This is an important moment for both realism's systemic analysis and for neoclassical realists. From a systemic perspective, only nation states are important actors, thus the emerging independence of the English colonies in America as the U.S. makes the U.S. a nation state and now fall within the systemic framework. However, for neoclassical realists, U.S independence is important because "[f]oreign policy choices are made by actual political leaders and elites, and so it is their

perceptions of relative power that matter, not simply relative quantities of physical resources or forces in being (Rose, p147). Thus, an analysis of the perceptions of elites and leaders prior to U.S. independence must be analyzed first before moving forward.

Prior to a formal recognition of U.S. independence, the U.S. was already acting as an independent nation when the Continental Congress adopted the Articles of Confederation (Articles) on November 15, 1777. The Articles created 13 sovereign and individual states. The Articles short comings were quickly realized by political elites such as John Adams and Alexander Hamilton. As ambassador to France in 1778, John Adams frequently struggled with the inability of the Continental Congress to make efficient and effective foreign policy choices. Moreover, Alexander Hamilton was keenly aware of the severe economic constraints the Articles created by not granting the Continental Congress the power to levy taxes, regulate commerce, or create consistent international economic policies. Hamilton, and other elites, reasoned that if American trade was valuable to England, it should be valuable to other nations and could be an important factor in the balance of power among European powers. This would give the U.S. considerable bargaining power in international relations (Aruga, p. 37). However, due to the weakness of the Articles, the Continental Congress relied heavily on international treaties, loans, and exploiting the well-known hostilities between the major powers of the 18th century, i.e., England, France, and Spain.

On February 6, 1778 the French and the Continental Congress signed the Treaty of Alliance that proclaimed that: 1) the U.S. would provide military assistance to France should England attack France, 2) that neither France or the U.S. would make peace with England until the U.S. won its independence, and 3) that France would recognize the U.S. as an independent nation after the war was won or a treaty was signed. This alliance was extremely important for

the U.S. because as a new nation that lacked a trained military, navy, or a strong centralized government, the U.S. was a weak state internationally speaking. Gideon Rose argued that neoclassical realism could predict the foreign policy agendas of weak states such as the U.S. prior to independence:

> "Neoclassical realism predicts that an increase in relative material power will lead eventually to a corresponding expansion in the ambition and scope of a country's foreign policy activity and that a decrease in such power will lead to a corresponding contraction. Thus, it is capable to predict that countries with weak states will take longer to translate an increase in material power into expanded foreign policy activity or take or more strategic and roundabout way to get there" (Rose, p. 167).

Thus, the U.S.'s temporary weakness could be tempered with time and financing, and that was exactly the foreign policy strategy of the U.S. prior to Independence.

Nonetheless, time, or the more precisely the inefficient use of time and the physical barriers to communication, i.e. the Atlantic Ocean, was a significant priority for the Continental Congress. IR Policy goals and international communications moved too slow, and that time left the U.S. vulnerable to foreign powers' interests in the outcome of the U.S.'s war for independence. The fertile commodities, raw materials, and land that the U.S. could provide to European powers were massive incentives to their imperial and colonial agendas. On April 18, 1780, during John Adams's ongoing negotiations with France, he wrote a letter to the Continental Congress warning of the clear vulnerability the U.S. had as a weak state with its reliance on stronger nation states, and suggested that the U.S. use soft power to keep its status quo relationships with stronger nation states like France. Adam's stated that:

> "Although, I am convinced by everything I see, and read and hear, that all the powers of Europe...rejoice in the American Revolution and consider the Independence of America in their interest and happiness...yet I have many reasons to think that not one of them, not even Spain or France, wishes to see America rise very fast to power....Let us above all things avoid as much as possible entangling ourselves with their wars and politics..." (McCullough, p. 235).

This foreign policy strategy is a perfect example of a cost benefit analysis. Adams's perception that the U.S. was a weak state necessitated that the young nation use soft power to deter an attack by other European powers if England was defeated. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr. explained this phenomenon from a liberal perspective in their theory of complex interdependence as: "Entanglement." For Keohane and Nye, "[e]ntanglement refers to the existence of various interdependences that make a successful attack simultaneously impose serious costs on the attacker as well as the victim. If there are benefits of the status quo and its continuation, a potential adversary may not attack—even if its attack is not defended against and there is no fear of retaliation—because it has something highly valuable to lose, and this contributes to deterrence" (Nye p. 58). What this means for the relationship between the U.S and France is that the U.S. knew that its lands, debts, and international trade were crucial to the stability of France's foreign policy strategies in their colonial and imperial ambitions, and more importantly, their military strategies against England. By Adams and the Continental Congress using its soft power to exploit the long-term animosities between France and England, the U.S. was able to create deterrence and maintain the status quo relationship with France.

Eventually, France would provide sufficient naval support to the U.S., and on September 5, 1781, in the battle of the Capes, the French granted the assistance of the French fleet in the

West Indies commanded by François Joseph Paul De Grasse to the U.S. war effort. With the French fleet directly engaged in the boundary waters and shores of the U.S. the British Navy was defeated and trapped English General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown leading to his surrender on October 19, 1781 (Zeller). By September 1783, the Treaty of Paris formally ended hostilities between England and the U.S., and England formally recognized the U.S. as an independent nation.

The soft power foreign policy strategy of 'non-entanglement', as Adams saw it, is an interesting synthesis of different IR theories. In one sense, it is a realist notion of expecting the worst in another nation state's intentions and is thus a form of defensive neorealism. In another sense, it exposes early interdependence relationships of trade that are the focus of modern liberal complex interdependence theory. However, from a NCRP, 'non-entanglement' synthesizes these two perspectives by combing the systemic nature of defensive neorealism and the perceptions of the elites and leaders, such as Adams, that the relative power of the U.S. necessitated specific foreign policy choices to ensure its independence and growth. Neoclassical realism's prediction that an expansion in material power would lead to an expansion in the ambition and scope of a country's foreign policy activity would appear to be accurate.

The next steps to true independence would require centralizing domestic power with a new Constitution, and the creation of an official U.S. navy to secure its foreign policy agendas and domestic security.

U.S Economic Independence

"To be a hegemonic power is to achieve a quasi-monopoly of geopolitical power, in which the state in question is able to impose its rules, its order, on the system as a whole, in ways that favor the maximization of accumulation of capital to enterprises located within its borders"

(Wallerstein, p.33). Simply, to maximize geopolitical power a state must organize a functional and trained military, the ability to effectively fund that military, and to create economic policies to support these goals and spread its economic reach globally. Young Alexander Hamilton learned both of these lessons as a merchant clerk and as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Continental Army.

Hamilton's early life in Saint Croix (1765) working as a clerk at Beekman and Cruger, an import export firm, Hamilton developed skills in economics and administration. (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration). By functionally interacting in international trade between the Dutch, British Colonies, and other European powers in commodities such as sugar, precious minerals, and the repugnantly immoral trade of slaves, Hamilton was exposed to the necessity of a strong centralized government. A strong centralized government could collect taxes, implement a unified system of weights and measurements, create a central banking system that would unify a nation's currency, create access to lines of credit, and fund a military that could spread the nation's influence internationally.

Between October 1787 and May 1788 Hamilton, along with John Jay, and James Madison, addressed the short comings of the Articles in a series of essays known as the Federalist Papers. In Federalist NO. 11, and NO. 12 Hamilton espoused the strengths of a stronger centralized government that could exert coercive force on "foreign countries to bid against each other, for the privileges of our markets." Additionally, that to protect and ensure the stability of these markets "the establishment of a federal navy...[that] would at least be of respectable weight if thrown into the scale of either the two contending parties" was paramount. Lastly, Hamilton argued that with a stronger centralized federal government, the ability of the government to regulate taxes and produce a unified currency would "facilitate the necessary

supplies to the treasury" for the creation of a national navy. The reason this is important from a NCRP is that it first exposes Hamilton's perceptions of the position of strength the current federal government of the U.S. possessed in the international system, and it also exposes the intervening variable of the "strength of a country's state apparatus and its relation to the surrounding society" (Rose, p.161). Rose argues that this variable is important because it brings an "...analysis closer to the real world without abandoning the paradigm's core concepts and assumptions" (Rose, p162).

On June 21, 1788 the Constitution of the United States was ratified establishing a strong centralized federal government. Now, the new U.S. federal government needed to protect its economic interests with foreign policy strategies that a more powerful centralized government could provide.

The quickest foreign policy strategy that the U.S. could use to protect its ports, trading routes, and economic agendas was privateering. During the Revolutionary War, and after the Treaty of Paris, the U.S. and European powers all used the strategic policy of privateering. "In general, the term privateer refers to a privately-owned ship or sailor commissioned by a government to raid an enemy's military and merchant shipping" (American Battlefield Trust). Privateering is not piracy because pirates are not sanctioned and paid by the state for their acts.

In 1794, the U.S and England signed the Jay Treaty to resolve trade, land, and debt disputes which angered the French, who then began to seize American merchant ships (American Battlefield Trust). The French Revolution was putting a strain on the French government and their war with England created a new problem for the U.S. when the British Navy began to seize U.S. ships, not for cargo, but for impressment. Impressment was an English strategy to keep a

flow of seaman in the ranks of its navy by seizing ships and its sailors and forcing them into service for the British Navy. (Bisno, p.2).

The universal naval strategy of privateering, piracy, and impressment came to a head in the Mediterranean when Algerine (Barbary) pirates had been paid by England to attack U.S. ships in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Oceans (Naval History and Heritage Command). This led to the official establishment of the U.S. Navy in 1794. "In 1795, the U.S. government dispatched diplomats...to North Africa and successfully concluded treaties with the states of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. Under the terms of the treaties, the United States agreed to pay tribute to these states" (Office of The Historian). The status quo did not last long, as future claims for tribute, or rejections of tribute, forced the U.S. to have frequent skirmishes in the Mediterranean from 1801-1816.

After the War of 1812 with England, future U.S. presidents would build up the strength and size of the U.S. Navy, and by December 2, 1823, U.S. President James Monroe would proclaim the Monroe Doctrine. This foreign policy strategy was delivered in a routine message to Congress that warned "...European nations that the United States would not tolerate further colonization of puppet monarchs" (National Archives). The doctrine was conceived to meet the major concerns of the moment, but it soon became a watchword of U.S. policy in the Western Hemisphere (National Archives). Moreover, the Monroe Doctrine can be viewed as a direct extension of Adams's principle of non-entanglement and a declaration of control of the Western hemisphere. Thus, the Monroe Doctrine is one of the fundamental foreign policy strategies that would aid the U.S. in its rise to prominence.

The Barbary Wars (1801-1816), the War of 1812, and the Monroe Doctrine (1823) create two important explanations under a NCRP. First, the restructuring of the state system with the

adoption of the U.S. Constitution, not only emphasizes domestic policy, but the necessity of a stronger federal government to deal with the systemic approach of realism' s view of its independent variable: conflict. Without the ability to centralize control of taxes, opening up lines of credit with a centralized bank, and appropriating funds to build ships for an official U.S. Navy, the U.S. was a weak and ineffectual state internationally. Second, by focusing on John Adams and Alexander Hamilton's perceptions that the U.S. was not only a weak state under the Articles, but that without change the U.S. could not protect their domestic and foreign policy interests. This is an important factor because it shows the interests of elites and their view on the relative power that the state holds and the external pressures it faces. These two explanations of foreign policy decisions led directly to a U.S. foreign policy rule of thumb in the Monroe Doctrine.

The above argument falls in line with the perspective of neoclassical realists like Thomas J. Christensen that argue that domestic factors or "national political power" are an essential variable in neoclassical realism, because understanding a leader's incentives and beliefs, along with their relative influence or power over the military, can complement and focus the generalized analysis of a systemic approach" (Rose, p161-162). Based on this analysis, both Rose and Christensen would appear correct that the synthesis of a systemic approach and the interests of leaders and elites can offer a more realistic all be it a simplistic world.

So, does the neoclassical realist approach really provide an analysis that is "closer to the real world" as Rose and other neoclassical realists argue?

A Constructivist Critique

One glaring international issue, that at first may appear to be only a domestic issue, must be analyzed if neoclassical realism is capable of creating an analysis closer to the real world, and that issue is the slave trade.

In negotiations to adopt the U.S. Constitution the issue of slavery was debated fiercely and anti-slavery advocates got an agreement to stop the importation of slaves by 1808. Pro-slavery advocates pushed for and got the infamous 3/5th's compromise. Once again, at first this appears to be a domestic issue; however, the entire system of slavery relied on international relationships, willful blindness, and international norms to create and enforce the Transatlantic slave trade.

The 1808 Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves on paper outlawed the international supply of human bondage, but the systems of colonialism had already taken hold and the commodities based on slave labor were entrenched in world economics. Basic economic theory dictates that systems like slavery that artificially lower the cost of production of goods, cheat the true market forces of supply and demand. Just like a water lock system, the market value of goods that are created by workers, i.e. paid or compensated in some fashion for their labor, dictate the cost of production and are the actual costs of the market system at a normal level. To move from the status quo to an artificial lower cost, and thus a higher profit, slavery lowers or eliminates the cost of production and therefore permanently changes the level of market prices globally.

Constructivism poses that the nature of anarchy is socially constructed through interactions, identities, and beliefs of states. Constructivist theory poses that we cannot separate ourselves from the reality in which we live in, and that our understandings of the world is based

on our social and historical interactions. Edward Said had a similar view of states as Immanuel Wallerstein did in that states have "lives," but that the further one travels from the location "where theory begins in order to generalize the dynamics of a particular conflict... [one must] still be invested in that place." (Salter, p.134). This means that if a theory is to be realistic and relevant it must deal with the actual lives, beliefs, perspectives, and social hierarchies in that society. Furthermore, critics of realism's reliance on an anarchic system, such as Errol Henderson, argue that IR theory in general is "initially based on a racist discourse that was about the obligations of superior people to impose order on the anarchic realm of inferior people..." (Unoki, p.73).

These criticisms are important because they expose that there were international concerns such as slavery that shaped international politics and left a lasting impact on the societies and peoples in all areas of the world that have participated in the immoral practice of slavery.

Conclusion

In summation, Gideon Rose and other neoclassical realists argue that neoclassical realism has the ability to bridge the gap between constructivism's micro intensive focus on case studies of a state's leaders and elites, and replace it with an analysis that will do a better job explaining foreign policy. From a NCRP by first analyzing the perceptions of the leaders and elites of a state, and the position of the state in the world of material power, it can expose the domestic issues that may drive leaders and elites based on their perceptions. Second, by analyzing what the external systemic pressures are on a state a predictive set of foreign policy options may be suggested. Last, by combing the above analyses with an analysis of how much power decision makers have in the use an implementation of the state's military power a more "real world" picture can be developed.

At first glance, and from a generalized theory, neoclassical realism does an adequate job of producing precise, short, and possibly predictive data that can be used, but it is not a magic bullet. IR theory must become more flexible and add in more interdisciplinary concepts such as comparative politics that would add in slavery's impact on domestic and foreign relations. As Stephen M. Walt argued of IR theory's rigid structuralism: "No single approach can capture all the complexity of contemporary world politics. Therefore, we are better off with a diverse array of competing ideas rather than a single theoretical orthodoxy" (Walt, p.30).

For this reason, even though neoclassical realism was capable of providing a precise and even predictive model of how the U.S. would use its increasing power to adopt foreign policy decisions that maximized its power, it fails to expose the domestic societal pressures that can expose a general ideology of a state. Thus, for a rising power to maximize its power to become the hegemonic state, it does not simply require military force as a leviathan. It requires complex policy decisions, such as flexible economic strategies along with foreign policy directives like the Monroe Doctrine, that can create long-term goals, not short-term relief of political and economic tensions.

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