

Relevance of neorealist analysis of foreign policy challenges of a small state with special reference to Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis

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Abstract

The neorealist explanation of systemic influences on foreign policy behavior of a country is argued out to be more relevant in case of a small state's responses towards external world in international relations theory. But some scholarly efforts have challenged this notion through empirical evidences. The main research purpose of this paper is to do the niche marketing on the relevance of neorealism in describing Sri Lanka's foreign relations. The qualitative content analysis on secondary data which were gathered through data triangulation method has been used for this research purpose.

Sri Lanka's foreign policy decisions was dominated by the strategic aspirations of the regional power. Driven by the security dilemma of the anarchism prevailing in the structure, equally placed states in the system strived to maintain their relative position in the international power spectrum for their survival. The powerful states made use of their power to defend their positions in the system while the smaller states had to rely on such powerful nations for their protection. Since Sri Lanka did not formally joined the western bloc it is not fully correct to say that it bandwagon. But Sri Lankan behavior in the international relations proved that it informally included itself in that coalition. Neorealism explains that the relative position of the states determined its behaviour, and if the states disregard the power imperatives of the system they had to bear the cost of doing that. This was evident in the Indo-Lanka relations. Sri Lanka had to legitimise the hegemonic role of India. When the balance of power had to be maintained in the system for its stability other regional and extra regional powers did not attempt to upset the status quo by providing any assistance to Sri Lanka as long as India became strategically a more important actor in the regional politics than that of Sri Lanka. The role of the regional and international organizations also proved the neorealist prediction on their minimal role is true, because the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the United Nation's Human Rights Council mainly involved in Indo-Lanka relations proved that they are only instrumental in implementing propaganda campaign of the member states. The states' power is above the organizations and even these organizations can be used for various political agendas of the member states. It further revealed that South Asia hugely lacks any credible and dynamic regional mechanism to work as a facilitating body in minimizing the regional tensions among the member states. To that end they had to rely on either extra-regional powers or the regional hegemons for the survival.

Neorealist analysis concludes that systemic factors are very much influential in determining Sri Lanka's foreign policy behavior. The external mediation and intervention by India and Norway with respect to the ethnic crisis were evident in Sri Lankan history which repeatedly proved even under two different regimes that the systemic pressures and persuasions are inevitable. The neorealist school of thought thus provides the necessary theoretical explanation required to justify Sri Lanka's foreign policy behavior in accordance with neorealism that emphasized the impact of systemic influences on foreign policy responses of Sri Lanka rather than the domestic political explanation.

Keywords: Neorealism, Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy, Ethnic crisis

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