

## INTRODUCTION TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Sheriff Folarin, PhD

Associate Professor

Department of Political Science and International Relations

Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria

### Introduction

International Relations (IR) as a course of study reflects the dynamics of the International System. The System is a complex web with multiple but mutually functioning components and is characterized by interfacing changes and continuities, which are instrumental in the dynamic nature of the discipline. IR is a broad discipline that encapsulates the multivariate aspects of man in the global contexts. It is what can be described as ‘a fusion of social science disciplines’, as it deals with the basic elements of the social man; the only difference is that it looks at such essentials in relational contexts beyond national borders.

What makes IR all the more distinct is its broad scope. Men have been living in social clusters: family units, hamlets, clans, villages, towns, cities, communities, and nations. There has always been a basis for social interactions as well as need to go beyond borders. This reinforces the thesis of the inevitability of mutuality or interdependence of men. So, history is replete with the interdependence of national groups, who having defined their boundaries have found one another in an unavoidable situation of mutual interaction. Such economic factors as scarcity and wants; social factors as friendship, enmity, intermarriages, expansion and land hunger; political factors as power, authority, influence and diplomacy; as well as military factors as coalition, alliance, and war; among other factors, have defined the contexts of IR. These historical basics have also been responsible for the two fundamental or recurring elements of international politics namely, cooperation and conflict.

The entirety of IR cannot be discussed in a single chapter. Indeed, there are volumes and volumes of IR texts and journals that have not exhaustively captured the issues or topics. There are new developments and new grounds broken everyday, even as older issues have not yet been exhausted because there are newer interpretations and theories to such historical issues, which even expand the bounds of IR knowledge. What each volume therefore does, is to examine selected issues or themes. This chapter is thus an introductory attempt for the understanding of the rudiments of IR. It deals essentially with the basic concepts and elements of International Politics (IP), which is pertinent for beginners (undergraduates) in the International Relations discipline.

### Concept of International Relations

A basic problem in the study of International Relations (IR) is the understanding of the definitional contexts. There are three basic levels of understanding. These include IR as a course of study, as a situation, and as a principle. We are therefore going to do a conceptual clarification of each of these.

*As a course of study*, IR refers to our discipline, what we are currently studying in that specialized Political Science class in which we are learning the politics among nations. It is the

field or body of knowledge that examines the totality of human relations across national boundaries. Goldstein (2010), reminiscent of Carr (1964) submits that IR is that branch of Political Science that deals with interactions between state and non-state actors in the international system. Brown in his book, *Understanding International Relations* (1995), notes that such relations transcend the political and governmental. Such non-state actors include inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational companies (TNCs) or multinational corporations (MNCs), which are not necessarily political in nature.

Hoffman (1977) defines IR as,

The discipline ...concerned with the factors and the activities which affect the external policies and power of the basic units into which the world is divided (Hoffman, 1977).

Hoffman attempts to view IR as a field that studies the foreign policies of states and factors determining the nature of such policies. The view is reinforced by Ola (1999) who argues that "International Relations are the study of all forms of interactions that exist between members of separate entities or nations within the international system". This perspective corroborates the earlier submission that IR is an expansive field of knowledge.

IR as a course of study has been studied for hundreds of thousands of years, as part of other disciplines such as Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology, Economics, and of course History and Political Studies. For instance, the likes of Thucydides, Sun Tzu, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and Clausewitz who were espousing the principles of political realism in the context of uses of power within and outside the state were laying the foundation for a popular and distinct school of thought today in IR study.

IR is a hybrid of several other disciplines. It was not until after the Second World War that bold attempts were made in the United States and Western Europe to carve a distinct course of study. The methodological approaches of such disciplines as Political Studies, History, Law, Philosophy, and Sociology, within which IR was subsumed at the time, did not allow for empirical, deeper and easy comprehension of international affairs. Political Studies was predominantly normative in approach, placing emphasis on institutions, structures and government, as well as adopting the descriptive method to discuss norms and values in the system. History adopted the narrative approach, which conservatively takes stock of only events but does not analyze them until they have "matured", after about 50 years. Sociology was equally descriptive in approach and paid little attention to the international social realities of the time. The methodology of all the disciplines in which IR was taught encumbered adequate knowledge and understanding of the empirical import of socio-political dilemmas between the two world wars (1914 to 1945). The combination of paucity of statistics and data, just as normative prisms denied professionals of those fields of predictive capacity.

It was not until after the First World War, that universities in the United States began to include scientific methodologies such as behaviorist approaches that Political Science emerged to look at issues more critically, stressing the human rather than the institutional actors. But this was not enough to make IR a distinct. The positive contributions of the University of Wales at Aberystwyth, the London School of Economics and the Wright Sisters also went a long way in

the development and establishment of IR as a distinct department or course of study. It is however pertinent to note that IR has different names in different social templates and institutions in the world. These include, International Studies, International Affairs, International Politics, and International Diplomacy, to mention a few. The word “International” may be a common denominator, but, in most cases, they are not technically the same. For instance, International Studies encompasses IR and other aspects of human society such as the cultural, scientific and economic areas, which may or may not be studied in relational or comparative contexts. International Affairs goes beyond international relations; like International Studies, it may not be study of relational situations between states, but looks at international relations and other aspects of the world. International Politics is just one of the sub-fields of International Relations. International Diplomacy is the nearest in meaning and content; but its teaching sometimes excludes other non-political areas.

The IR field has sub-fields, which are also regarded as areas of specialization. These include Diplomacy, Diplomatic History, Foreign Policy, International Law, International Organizations, International Finance, International Economics or International Economic Relations, International Communications, Strategic Studies, and War/Conflict and Peace Studies.

*As a situation*, IR describes the state of interaction between two or more actors in separate national boundaries. Put differently, it describes the relationships that take place by members of the international community. These include all or any aspects of their relationship such as war, conflict, dispute, separation, belligerency, settlement, pact, treaties, cooperation, conferences, and organization.

*As a principle*, IR refers to a set of ideas that constitute the public policy that a state makes for the purpose of the external context. It describes the foreign policy of a state, international organization or region, which are articulated, formulated and implemented by an International Department, or a State Department or Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The totality of such policy process is what is sometimes referred to as, for instance, the International Relations of Nigeria, or International Relations of Africa or International Relations of the United Nations. In some cases, it is referred to as the International Diplomacy of Africa. In some literature, preference is for International Politics of Nigeria or a particular institution or state.

### **Approaches to the Study of IR: Idealism, Liberalism and Realism**

Approaches to the study of IR refer to the ways by which issues in international politics are viewed. These are broad contending schools of thought, which sharpen perspectives, as well as analysis and the study of IR. These are realism, liberalism and idealism.

The *idealist* approach is that which strengthens the view that international politics is not about a theatre of war. It regards the relationship that exists between states as one that does not necessarily create disorder and descent into anarchy. The idealist school is premised on the Wilsonian theory that peace and order can reign in an international system of politics, that is, where there are conscious and sustained efforts to maintain order. Man as a social being is thus a moral being, and with law to guide the relations and control boundaries, coupled with education which nourishes and ennobles the soul, as well as the presence of a system of law, man can live without anarchy.

Idealism as a school of thought gained currency after President Woodrow Wilson of the United States who, after the First World War, presented some ideals that can promote global mutual understanding, peace and order. His 14-point Agenda for global peace was a monumental pathway for the creation of an international organization and an enduring international legal order aimed at minimizing international conflict, promoting cooperation among peoples as well as preventing another global chaos as was the case from 1914 to 1918.

Idealism has its antecedents. As early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Italian poet, Dante had written of the “Universality of Man” in which he envisioned a unified world state. Immanuel Kant had also articulated that ‘doing good’ was an end unto itself, an ideal that gave rise to the moral suasion aspect of international relations. The Chinese, during the reign of the Chou dynasty in the ancient times, had attempted to create a world state in the Orient. Ancient and medieval empires and civilizations such as the Egyptians of North Africa, Assyrians and Persians in the Middle East, Aztecs and Incas of South and Central America, as well as the Roman Empire of Europe, had attempted to establish a world state.

The idealist school is thus a fundamental prism to look at international relations. Its core submission is that the international system will ultimately transit from the system that it is though a community, into an international society. It stresses the central role of international law, international morality and international organization in the transition. It is pertinent to note that, the idealist school is an expanding one, which is attractive to a growing number of IR scholars that believe that the world is, with globalization and order created by the United Nations and the many international institutions springing up to bring peoples and actions together in coordinates, already transiting to a world society.

**Realism** is the IR school that is pessimistic about moral suasion in international politics. The realist argument begins with the natures of politics and man. Politics, which principally means the determination of who gets what, when and how, or the authoritative allocation (sharing) of values (resources), gives little or no room for morality or best behaviour. Moreover, man is by nature selfish and aggressive, and on a matter that involves the sharing of scarce resources over which all are contending, law and order or moral consciousness would be the last recourse. Politics is thus the opposite of morality. Talking about morality and law in “politics” therefore translates to putting a square peg in a round hole: they do not go together.

Against this background, the realist school holds that international relations or politics and by implication the international system have the tendency to be anarchical. Hobbes sums it up this way: *bellum omnium contra omnes* or the war of all against all. There may be aggravated anarchy because of three overriding issues that characterize inter-state relation: national interest, national power and military strategy. Indeed, realists focus on these three in their analysis bearing in mind that historical experience has demonstrated these tendencies, and the system continues to show the tendencies.

National interest, a set of objectives a nation has articulated as its principal targets in its external relations, is a primary factor in international politics. Morgenthau (1962) who has extended the frontiers of political realism in his groundbreaking *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, argues that the main push factor for states in the international community is

their uncompromised interest and that consequently, the ambitions of states or the clashes of national interests have made international politics a fertile ground for conflict. National interest is not only an end in itself; it is also a means to an end. National power is the ultimate aim of states. Power here refers to national values, economic riches, or national wealth and the occupation of a vantage position in the international community. Power also thus becomes an end in itself as well as a means to an end too.

To actualize their interest or gain such value, states conceive of strategic roles to occupy in international politics. This is the national role conception (NRC) which is done at the foreign policymaking stage (Holsti, 1987). Role conception is a crucial stage in foreign policy as it determines the level of achievement of a state as well as the success or failure of its foreign policy (Folarin, 2010). It is during the role conception stage that variants such as military strategy for the purpose of the pursuit of national power, is considered.

Power thus becomes a scarce but essential commodity for which every state searches. For realists, the conflict of interest, collision of roles, and struggle for power thus make the international system prone to conflict and anarchy. This is why political realism is often referred to as 'power politics' as it strongly views international politics as essentially and solely the pursuit or struggle for power among states.

Power politics or the realist paradigm or approach as espoused over the centuries by Sun Tzu, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, E.H. Carr, Von Clausewitz and Hans Morgenthau, among others, contends that the international environment is anarchic and as such national security is the ultimate interest or goal in such an environment. Nations are thus impelled to make rational power calculations in pursuit of national security such that countries satisfied with the international *status quo* work towards its sustenance; those dissatisfied with it tend to be expansionist; while friendship or enmity (alliances) are based on the reality of the situation as it affects national interest (*realpolitik*). For them, international organization is not borne out of any kind of moral suasion but *realpolitik*: alliances and ephemeral friendships for the purpose of balance of power capable of deterring would-be aggressors or predators in the global system.

Machiavelli's words aptly summarize the school of realism:

He will prosper most whose mode of acting best adapts itself to the character of the times; and conversely that he will be unprosperous, with whose mode of acting the times do not accord.

***Liberalist*** approach in international politics flows from the broad liberal ideology which tends to describe the international system as a group of states and non-state actors whose inevitable mutual interdependence ultimately requires social, legal and economic order for states to fully realize their goals. The liberal school tends to marry some aspects of both the realist and idealist schools. The liberal paradigm agrees with the notion the notion of vulnerability of the international system because of conflicting interests, but sees the need for the establishing of law and order coupled with the organization of states into groups as the most effective way to avert anarchy.

The liberalists see a strong bond in democracy, peace, commerce, law, institutions and alliances and the import of all these in the prevention of conflict and anarchy. The focal point of this perspective is that democratic systems are more likely to promote an international environment of peace, friendship and cooperation that will promote a prosperous commerce and trade. To strengthen this kind of auspicious environment, a legal system is required which can be best achieved by international grouping.

With firm structure on ground to see to the implementation of agreements and enforcement of law, nations will maintain the peaceful status quo. Strong economic and military alliances are also encouraged as these would see to joint actions in economic development and collective security measures to ward of agents of destabilization. According to Jumarang (2011), liberalism believes in the measurement of power through state economies, the possibility of peace and cooperation, as well as the concepts of political freedoms, rights and the like, an idea shared by Fukuyama in his classic, *End of History and the Last Man* (1992) that western liberal democracy is the final form of human government.

The liberalist school therefore sees the 'realism' in anarchy if the system is not well managed. It however believes that managing the anarchic situation is possible when such groups as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), European Union (EU) or even the United Nations (UN) are in place to prevent critical economic or security situations.

### **Level of Analysis Problem in IR**

This simply refers to the critical junctures or arduous tasks faced in selecting the appropriate analytical framework in IR analysis. Levels of analysis are categories of generalization or abstraction to help understand the complex problems in international politics. There are three main frameworks namely, individual, state and international levels of analysis. There is the globalist framework still evolving at the moment. Each is distinct from the other, but yet each can be used in explaining a particular set of phenomena. Where the problem lies however, is that an analyst may be constrained by certain limitations inherent in each of these three frameworks, or could be tempted to use more than one of them. When this happens, the analysis is limited.

It is not apposite to use more than one, because each framework has its own merits and comes with its own peculiar strands and conclusions. Using more than one will thus make the analysis unwieldy and the conclusion, confusing. The state level of analysis for instance, is commonplace in realist analyses while the individual and international or globalist frameworks are the favourites of idealists. Now, let us briefly examine the level of analysis.

*Individual:* This is the level that holds moral principles of individuals may translate into that of nations and form of government. The moral principles of Napoleon Bonaparte for instance, transcended the French society as it became the political system of Continental Europe at a point. Woodrow Wilson's ideals became the core values for democratic governments and indeed the international system from 1920. Today, democratic governments exist as moral examples for other nations such as Africa, America. The individual level is often the strength of analysts who refer to the behaviour and idiosyncrasies of, or events surrounding leaders as transferrable outside national boundaries to create a chain reaction and global phenomenon. Examples include

the murder of Austrian Crown-Prince Frantz Ferdinand and the First World War; Hitler's ambitions and the Second World War; Ojukwu's sense of judgment and the Nigeria- Biafra War; and Osama bin Ladin's Islamist ideals and global terrorism as we have it today.

*State:* This is the unit level of analysis. It locates its explanation at the level of the state, rather than the international system. Its argument begins with the fact that inter-national politics itself bears the tag "nation" or state, and as such world politics is characterized by the behaviour of (state) units, whose actions (national interests, national roles, national security, national power, among other quests), determine the happenings in the global system. The inactions of states (such as watching without intervening while the Rwandan Holocaust was going on) could also shape international and the domestic politics of states. The unit level of analysis is strengthened by the fact that all non-state actors (including even global organizations as the UN) do not exist outside state boundaries. Further, such even work for the interest of inter-sate peace, cooperation or mutual help. The state cannot be wished away. Even if nothing else, the state gives accommodation to non-state actors, protects or shields them, and grants visas to individuals and groups of such organizations. Hence, the state gives political and legal expression to the non-state actors.

*International:* This is the level that holds that it is the nature of the international system that determines the behaviour of states and the attitudes of leaders or governments. An instance is drawn from Weber (2012) who argues that the central proposition of classical realism that the relations between states are anarchic because of lack of a central power or world government to maintain order and stability, is what Neorealists have built on, making anarchy the logic of the international system. The anarchy of the international system thus becomes compelling factor for states to pursue power and act amorally in the course of self-preservation. Put differently, the structure of international politics is what compels states to act in the international system. The theory implies that states no longer have a conscious interest in forming foreign policy but that the best possible policy formulas are determined by the structure of the anarchical system itself.

There are other levels of analysis as there are other schools of IR that have evolved over the years, but which have not been mentioned in this chapter. The other schools of IR are Neorealism and Neoidealism (both of which, incidentally use the international system level, but with arguments), Marxism (which uses the class level), Marxism-Leninism, which uses the finance capital level), and Constructivism or Post-Structuralism (text level of analysis).

### **Basic Concepts in IR**

There are many concepts in IR. The concepts are however common to Political Science sub-fields and as such have been mentioned in this book, while some have already been defined in this chapter. For these reasons, we will limit ourselves to only the very basic terms in IR, which include diplomacy, foreign policy, instruments of state policy, war, alliances and balance of power.

**1. Diplomacy:** Broadly speaking, diplomacy is the employment of tact in dealing with people in such a way that their minds, if not won, are carried along. Originally, diplomacy is derived from Latin and Greek word, diploma, which means a folded official document. In our context however, diplomacy is simply the conduct of international relations. Kissinger (1999) and some

other scholars and practitioners have described diplomacy as the art of conducting relations (treaties, external trade, peacemaking, war, issues of environment, culture and external representation) through polite, non-hurtful manner on behalf of a state through the engagement of professionals. This perspective attempts to conceptualize diplomacy as an official act or formal practice of the state to gain strategic advantage or finding mutually acceptable solutions to shared challenges. Diplomacy is thus both a theory and a practice. It also could be informal. Informal diplomacy involves the use of non-practitioners by a state to deal with international issues. Such persons are usually very influential individuals with international popularity, particularly in the country they are being sent, could be drawn from the academia, think-tanks, clergy or entertainment industry. In Western countries, this is a component of what is referred to as citizen diplomacy; it is also called Track 11 diplomacy.

Modern diplomacy is traceable to Renaissance Italy in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when Milan began the idea of establishing formal embassies in other countries. This initiative soon spread to other parts of Europe and then down through the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the Peace of Westphalia to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century with the emergence of more states and expansion of the basis for international relations. International diplomacy generally involves the resolution of international problems. It takes the forms of arbitration, mediation, conferences, and negotiations.

**2. Foreign Policy:** This refers to a set of principles that guide the conduct of a nation's external relations. That is why in Western literature, it is sometimes called foreign relations policy. Foreign policy is sometimes loosely referred to as diplomacy; but in actual fact, all foreign policies are conducted by instruments of diplomacy. Foreign policy is premised on national self-interest: policy-makers articulate goals or objectives of the nation in the international community with the view of gaining mileage and strategic advantage in international politics.

Foreign policy is therefore the general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2012). It is instructive to note that the foreign policies of states are primarily determined by domestic considerations, including strategic interests, economic and military potentials, quality of leadership and citizens, quality of ideas in government, geographical vantages, among other factors. External factors shaping foreign policy include the behaviour of other states, manifestations in the global system, plans to advance specific geopolitical designs, as well as external threats.

**3. National Interest:** This refers to the strategic goals of a state in international politics. It is embedded in the country's foreign policy and actualized through diplomacy and other instruments. National interest is the *raison d'état* or the reason of the State in international politics. It represents the ambitions of the state expressed by policy makers in their definition of the nation's international relations. National interest is articulated, gauged, aggregated and made by policy makers or government.

National interest is the central plank in the school of power politics or political realism. Primary in national interest is national survival and preservation, which constitute a state's short-term objectives. The mid-range objectives of a state include pursuit of welfare, wealth or prosperity of the nation. Long-range interests include the emergence of a state as a regional or world power, expansion of external influence and domination.



**4. National Role Conception:** This refers to policy makers' articulation of the content of the state actions in international politics in order to gain desired mileage and strategic advantage over other states (Holsti, 1987). National roles are conceived by policy makers, who do this to complement national interest because it is by tangible roles played in international community that national interest can be accomplishable. National role conception therefore gives life to national interest or objectives (Folarin, 2012).

National role conception is shaped by a number of factors. Predominant factors include leaders' perceptions of who the state is and what the state has the capacity to do; interpretations of the roles of the state has the potentials to undertake; and the expectations of the international community about roles the state should play in given circumstances. For instance, in the face of global terrorism spreading to Africa (Somalia, Kenya and Nigeria), the United States and Western Europe are expected to increase their roles in the continent in assisting counter-offensive measures.

**5. War:** War is usually regarded as the absence or opposite of peace and diplomacy because it represents a breakdown in states' interaction. War is generally referred to as direct aggression between parties. In IR, war has been described as the state of hostility (actual or mutually declared aggression) between two or more parties with the oversight of a third party (neutral non-partisan umpire). War has to be mutually declared before it can be so regarded, and when aggression becomes physical, it has to be prosecuted by the engagement of armed forces. In this case, it means all wars can be called conflict. But can all conflicts be called war? The answer is "no" because not all conflict situations involve the mutual declaration of aggression, nor third parties. There are certain conflict situations that do not involve the use of armed forces, and yet there are times when conflict goes on and yet a shot is not fired. Conflict and war are therefore two different concepts. War is conflict, but not all conflicts are wars. But like war, conflict is a state of hostility between parties.

Carl von Clausewitz defines war as the continuation of politics by other means. This implies that war, like trade, the Olympics, or diplomacy, is another instrument of states interaction. Incidentally, war is the expression of dissatisfaction, "anger" or "hate", just as cooperation and alliance is the expression of agreement or "love". The middle point between war and peace is consensus. By consensus, compromises and concessions are made by two or more contending parties for the sake of peace.

**6. Instruments of State Policy:** These refer to the means or strategies by which states conduct their foreign policies. They are embedded in national role conception. These include political, economic, military, and cultural instruments.

Political instruments include diplomacy, propaganda, summitry and conferences, alliances, treaties. Diplomacy encompasses most if not all of these instruments. *Propaganda* is an informal diplomatic channel by which a government penetrates the populace of another state with the view to making them influence their government to bend to its goals. These channels include formal access such as cable news, newspapers, press statements, slant stories, et cetera; and informal access such as social network media, ICT devices, literature books, music, and movies, through which a particular society imbibes and follows the will of another society without

consciously realizing it. *Summitry* involves the periodical gathering of political leaders to appraise issues or chart fresh course of relations. Bilateral summits involve two states; multilateral summits are between several states or bodies such as international organizations as the African Union, United Nations and North Atlantic Treaty Organization. *Alliance* is the strategic understanding and special relationship between two or more states for mostly security and economic ends. *Treaty* is a pact or a formally documented agreement between states on matters that can further or preserve their cause in the international community.

Economic instruments include sanctions, tariffs, trade, boycott, sabotage or subversion, and embargo. *Sanctions* are punitive economic actions to compel a state to conform to international law or the selfish ambitions of some powerful states. Nigeria under General Sani Abacha encountered economic sanctions from Europe for its poor human rights records. Mugabe of Zimbabwe also faced economic sanctions to compel him to improve on his human rights conduct. *Tariffs* are import and export duties on goods that can be used (reduced or increased) by a state to encourage or frustrate another state depending on the interest of the former. *Embargo* refers to the outright refusal to buy or formal banning of goods from a particular country for one political purpose or the other. *Boycott* is like embargo. It however refers to the pulling out from an international trade with another state or other states. Sabotage is a criminal act of subversion, which may involve the outright damaging of a nation's economic facility, goods, trade routes, et cetera.

Military instruments include war, exchange of military attaches, exchange of military knowledge, shared capacity and joint actions (such as ECOWAS' military actions in war-torn Liberia and Sierra Leone and NATO's involvement in Libya), and blockade. *Blockade* refers to a military action that aims at cutting off an enemy state's area, in part or totally, from communication and supplies (food, water, relief and war materials). For instance, between 1810 and 1814 there was a total British blockade of the French Port of Toulon by its fleet to punish France in the course of the conflict between the two countries.

Cultural instruments of policy are gaining momentum in current international politics. Cultural instruments are much smoother means by which powerful states expand their reach and influence in the world. It is the less hurtful form of propaganda and a component of informal diplomacy. Wealthy states establish their cultural centres or villages and build educational institutions in other countries (particularly the developing countries), and deploy cultural officers to their embassies abroad, with the ultimate aim of spreading their national values. In some cases, such wealthy states endow scholarships to be offered to fellows that will spend some time in the academic environment of the donor nations. The cultural content of such fellowship experience becomes valuable in meeting the national goals of the donors.

**7. Balance of Power:** This is a famous concept in realist literature. As a practice, it was the currency of diplomacy after the fall of Napoleon Bonaparte, and it dominated the foreign policy of Germany under Otto von Bismarck. It had to be a common denominator in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century so as to put paid to the emergence and hegemony of another predatory state. The unsavoury experience of the quick succession of the Holy Roman Empire and France under Napoleon was too much to bear as it was still fresh in memory. In 1814 therefore, a movement began aimed at "balancing power" among the powerful and preventing another single dominant

power. From the Vienna Congress to the infamous “Concert”, “balance of power” gained currency.

Balance of power is thus the theory that national security is guaranteed when military capabilities are distributed in such a way that no single state strong enough to dominate or threaten the security of others. The contention is that when there is a military hegemon among states, it will take advantage of its strength on weaker ones, which makes it imperative for weaker states to unite in a defensive coalition (Kegley, 2005). As such, there will be relative stability in a potentially anarchic international system when there is equilibrium or balance of power among potentially aggressive configurations.

The theory and practice of balance of power is evident in today’s international politics. It has manifested in the idea of collective security put up by states and international organizations, military alliances and security coalitions to tackle problems hindering world peace.

### **Conclusion**

IR is an exhaustive discipline that deals with a wide range of issues as they affect relations on a global scale. We have however, been able to examine the basic issues and concepts that are common denominators in most (if not all) of international politics. It is expected that students and scholars of IR will regard and employ this as a glossary to guide them in deepening their search for knowledge on world politics.

## **References**

## **For Further Reading**