



# Morality in International Relations

## What is International Morality?

International morality refers to **morals or codes of conduct governing relations between nations**. The present day world is divided into many independent territorial political communities. They constitute the international political order sometimes called the **international legal order**.

- The basic feature of this order is the **'sovereign equality'** of states. The present conception of sovereign equality is derived mainly from the **United Nations Charter**.
- International relations **can be analysed from three points of view:**
  - How nations behave towards one another and the reasons or motivations behind their behaviour.
  - One may study international relations normatively to prescribe desirable kinds of behaviour to nations.
  - Finally, international relations can be studied for advising governments on how best to conduct foreign relations in national interests.
    - In one way or another, **moral aspects enter into these different approaches.**

## What is Sovereignty?

- **About:** Sovereignty is the ultimate authority or power possessed by a state as an embodiment of its political community. Sovereignty **represents the will of the people**, which is theoretically absolute and unfettered.
  - It is the supreme political authority that a state exercises within its territory. States exercise these powers without any restrictions from other states.
- **State and the Government:** A state needs to be distinguished from a government as **governments are temporary** and hold office for certain specified periods, and in democracies, they may be replaced by other governments after elections.
  - However, a **state is permanent** and lives as long as the political community it represents.

## Nation vs. State: What's the Difference?

- A nation is a group that thinks of itself as **'a people,'** usually because they share many things in common. These consist of a common territory, history, culture, language, religion and way of life.
- The state has a narrower meaning referring to the constitutional arrangements which determine **how a nation is governed**. Or 'state' refers to the machinery of government that **organises life in a given territory**.
  - Thus, it is possible to distinguish between the state and its people.
- Modern nations are largely nation states. States have been in existence since ancient times. However, before the modern period in history, countries were **mostly monarchies and empires**, held together by loyalty to a ruling dynasty rather than by any sense of nationalism.
  - Historians trace the origins of nation states, if not of nationalism, to the **eighteenth century**. The first movements for nation states **arose in Italy and Germany and spread later to other parts of the world**.
- In some countries, such as America, Australia and Canada, the state comprises many nations, and they are **'multi-national societies'**.
- Societies with heavy immigration are seen as multi-national. Multinational countries are

sometimes **prone to civil wars** between different groups.

## What about the Internal Policy and Foreign Policy?

- Foreign Policy determines a country's relations with other countries. Foreign policy is also **closely allied to a country's diplomacy**. A country's foreign policy is seen as distinct from its domestic or internal policy.
  - Thus, a country's policy towards health or primary education is a part of its internal or domestic policy. But whether a country will join in a military arrangement with other countries will be determined by its foreign policy.
- However, there is **always some interdependence between a country's domestic and foreign policies**.

## What are the Moral Roots of India's Foreign Policy?

- It was **Jawaharlal Nehru who shaped India's foreign policy** Mahatma Gandhi's thinking and philosophy influenced it greatly. India's foreign policy is based on the Gandhian values of its freedom struggle.
- It was **Gandhian ideas that set the tone of India's foreign policy** in the early decades of its independence. These were:
  - Non-alignment or the right to follow an independent foreign policy and to decide foreign policy issues on merits,
  - Moral, diplomatic and economic support for the struggle against colonialism, racialism and apartheid,
  - Non-violence and the quest for nuclear disarmament, and
  - India's role as an international peacemaker.
- Both supporters and critics of Indian foreign policy **invariably focus attention on Panchsheel Treaty**. It goes back to a stage long past in Indian foreign policy.

## What was the Panchsheel Treaty?

- **The Panchsheel Treaty** (from Sanskrit, panch: five, sheel: virtues) is considered the high watermark of the diplomacy of this period.
- It consists of five principles for peaceful coexistence **between nations or for governing relations between states**.
  - Their first formal codification in treaty form was in an **agreement between China and India in 1954**.
- The **five principles to which states have to subscribe are:**
  - Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty
  - Mutual non-aggression
  - Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs
  - Equality and mutual benefit
  - Peace and coexistence
- Panchsheel is premised on the belief that the states which became independent after the colonial era would be able to develop a new and more principled approach to international relations.
  - The five principles were later included in a revised form in the ten principles of the **Asian-African Conference in Bandung (1955)**. The Five Principles formed the basis of the Non-Aligned Movement, which began in Belgrade in 1961.
- It ended as a sad story for India. The boundary dispute between **India and China resulted in the outbreak of open war in 1962**.
  - Panchsheel (April 1954) agreement was set to last for eight years. When it lapsed, the agreement's renewal provision was not taken up.

## What are the Theories of IR?

The most prominent theories are realism and idealism, both of which have a long history. Neorealism and neoliberalism have become popular in the twentieth century. Doctrines of post-modernism and feminism have also influenced some IR theories.

#### ▪ Realism:

- Realism is an old doctrine that clearly states that a **ruler should make a realistic assessment** of the dangers from external enemies and take defensive measures. He should not merely place faith in the good intentions of other rulers.
  - At the same time, a ruler **should abide by the rules of good behaviour**. He should not attack and annex weaker kingdoms.
- According to modern realist thinkers, in the absence of common rule-making and enforcing authority, the international arena is essentially a self-help system. Each state has to **ensure its survival, define its interests and pursue power**.
- For realists, the world of (nation) states is anarchic, and **security is the overriding goal of any state**. To this end, states try to increase their power and engage in power-balancing for the purpose of deterring potential aggressors.

#### ▪ Idealism:

- Idealism may be defined as the spirit which leads an individual or group to **adopt loftier moral standards** than those which prevail around them. Idealism in international relations **can be traced back to the practices which governed relations between rulers in olden times**.
  - One area in which the practices operated was war. Over time, norms arose that regulated the conduct of war, treatment of prisoners and of the vanquished who surrendered.
- Idealism in the sense of adherence to moral principles also **became relevant to treaties that ended wars** or laid down agreements between rulers.
- Treaties involved **principles of good faith, reciprocity and honouring agreements in letter and spirit**.
  - Honouring international agreements and observing conventions of warfare became matters of moral principles. **No nation should violate these to secure any undue advantage**.

#### ▪ Neo-realism

- Kenneth N. Waltz reformulated realism in international relations in his book Theory of International Politics. His version is called **structural realism or neorealism**.
- Waltz **abandoned Morgenthau's speculations** on human nature and the struggle for power. He argues that states in the international system, like firms in a domestic economy, seek survival.
  - "Internationally, the environment of states' actions, or the structure of their system, is set by the fact that **some states prefer survival over other ends obtainable in the short run** and act with relative efficiency to achieve that end"
- Consequently, Waltz sees **power and state behaviour in a different way** from the classical realists. Morgenthau claimed that states seek to rationally maximise their power. In contrast, Waltz assumes that **each state seeks security and would therefore concentrate on the distribution of power** in the international system.

## Morgenthau's Speculations

- Power or interest makes politics an independent field of study. Rational state actors pursue their national interests. This premise can be the basis for a rational theory of international politics. Such a theory ignores as irrelevant the morality, religious beliefs, motives or ideological preferences of individual political leaders.
  - It implies that states should avoid moral crusades or ideological confrontations and look for compromise on the basis of satisfaction of their mutual interests alone. This is how conflicts can be prevented.
- Neoliberalism
  - Liberal institutionalists (another name for neoliberal thinkers) believe that states **can seek security through the construction of international agreements**, regimes and structures such as arms control agreements like:
    - **The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty I and II** (START I and START II)
    - Multilateral economic institutions like the **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**.
  - States can engage each other through these structures, learning norms of peaceful

cooperation and developing a common interest in the status quo (existing situations).

- Liberalism is most closely associated with the work of Immanuel Kant who argued that **peace is achieved through international institutions and the spread of democracy.**

#### ▪ Postmodernism

- Postmodernism is a movement in Western philosophy that **arose in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.** It rejects the values and worldview derived from modern Western philosophical theories grounded in a rational scientific outlook.
  - It has **little faith in human reason** and denies the possibility of objective knowledge, especially in social sciences.
- Postmodernism regards the conclusions of social science, art and literature as **based on an individual's subjectivity.** It views mainstream social values and institutions with scepticism and suspicion.
- It regards that the political and social power of dominant sections of society, **based on overt or covert ideology,** permeates social sciences and humanities.

#### ▪ Feminism

- Feminism is the belief that **men and women should have equal rights and opportunities,** it is an organized activity in support of women's rights and interests.
- The movement witnessed three waves:
  - **The First Wave:** Women sought full legal equality with men, including full educational opportunity, equal compensation and the right to vote.
  - **The Second Wave:** It arose by challenging the restricted role assigned to women in the workplace and the tendency to confine women to the household arena.
  - **The Third Wave:** It arose in the late 20th century and was notable for challenging middle-class feminists and for broadening feminism's goals to encompass equal rights for all people, regardless of race, creed, economic or educational status, physical appearance etc.

## What are the New Dimensions of International Morality?

- In recent years, political thinkers have **widened the scope of discussions on international morality.** Changes in theory and contemporary events contributed to this trend.
- The **new topics which now figure on discussions of international morality** are the following:
  - Transfer of resources from rich countries to less developed nations.
  - Removing inequities in economic exchanges (trade, commerce and finance) between developed and less developed countries.
  - Giving greater voice to developed countries in the working of international organisations.
  - Humanitarian assistance to countries in the grip of famine and immiserisation.
  - Intervention in states which carry out **genocide**, ethnic cleansing, or war on their own people.
  - Naturalisation of people who migrate into a country and settle there.
  - Adopting a cosmopolitan as opposed to a national approach to morals.
- In 2015, The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.
  - Imperative resource transfers alone cannot help developing countries overcome the challenges. **Rich countries can reform their trade and other policies** to help poor countries.
    - Changes in trade, investment, migration, environment, and technology policies in rich countries would help people from poor countries. They have to bear the main burden of carrying out measures for protecting the environment. This is known as **"common but differentiated responsibility"**.
  - Rich nations need to be liberal in their policies for transferring technologies to poor nations. They have to assist poor countries, many of whom are caught in severe external debt problems and other extreme conditions. This is how **moral and ethical behaviour is carried out by the countries,** and which is somehow required for achieving every facet of these goals.



## What happens during the Intervention in the Other States?

- The basic norm of international political order is **respect for independence and sovereignty of nations**. This implies that outside powers should not intervene in the internal affairs of a nation.
  - Such intervention is countenanced when in certain emergencies the **Security Council of the UN** authorizes intervention.
- **Emergencies can originate from many causes**. Two important circumstances that are mainly considered are:
  - An emergency can arise **when a state conducts genocide against its own population**. For example, the killing of six million Jews by the Nazis under Hitler.
  - Another emergency arises due to '**ethnic cleansing**'. This means that in an area inhabited by a diverse population, a particular section is forcibly ejected.
    - The section of the population targeted for eviction is selected on the basis of its race, ethnicity or religion.

## What is the Ethical Basis for War and Peace?

- There are **three main schools of thought on the ethics of war and peace** Realism, Pacifism, and Just War Theory. The chief tenets of International Law are derived from the Just war theory.
  - **Just War Theory**: According to the Just War theory, **war perhaps at times is morally right**. No war, however, is praiseworthy for being strategic, prudent, or bold. Occasionally, war represents an ethically appropriate use of mass political violence.
    - World War II, on the Allied side, is often **cited as the definitive example of a just and good war**.
    - Just war theory is **divided into three parts** that have Latin names. These parts are:
      - **Jus Ad Bellum**: About the justice of resorting to war in the first place.
      - **Jus in Bello**: It is about justice of conduct within war.
      - **Jus Post Bellum**: This is about the justice of peace agreements and the termination phase of the war.
  - **Realism**: It denies the applicability of moral concepts like justice to foreign policy. Power and national security guide the states in wartime, talk of the morality of warfare is fictitious.
    - Ethics have no role in the harsh domain of global politics. **Nations pursue their vital interests** in security, dominion over others, and economic growth, unmindful of moral ideals.
  - **Pacifism**: It believes that morals are relevant to international affairs. Pacifism argues that war should never be undertaken. Just war theory considers that some wars are just and permissible, **pacifism always prohibits wars**.
    - Pacifists regard war as always wrong for any problem always has a better solution than war.