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IDEALISM AND ITS EFFECTS

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İSTANBUL, 2019.

Introduction

Human is the social being and needs to socialize with others. It can be taken as the basis for the formation of international relations. All human beings live in the same world but they did not have the capacity to connect with each other. Of course, it has changed after globalization in modern ages. However, people were in need of states command to take advantages of other countries but unlike citizens' benefit, states used all chances for their own benefits and these kinds of problems created warfare between states. It is known the fact that wars have no gains but loss because both sides give too much loss and most importantly they lose humans even they have gained some advantages at the end of the war. Nevertheless, these gains are mainly about enlarging lands and other things, which are not important more than human life. Idealism emerged at that certain time for determining human value in these cases. Because human lives are important for continuity of the world and idealism tries to protect humanity. Norman Angels say wars and armament take humanity to back and we need works based on wealth. Idealism base on protecting peace and cooperation between states through trade and some other ways for establishing the main order at the international level where there is no such institution to regulate states' act. In order to this aim, idealist thinks they should firstly remove war environment for stability. It tries to understand the causes of war and find a way to peace. The narrow understanding sees idealism as intimately tied to the inter-war period (1919-1939). After the destruction of World War I, idealism was in search of how to stop the wars and improve peace by establishing organisations by using international law, norms and diplomacy.

There are many intellectuals who defend idealism; Sir Alfred Zimmerman, S. H. Bailey, Philip Noel-Baker, David Mitrany, Woodrow Wilson, James T. Shotwell, Pitman Potter and Parker T. Moon.¹ This article is going to examine these intellectuals as well to explain idealist

¹ Ramazan Gözen, *Theories of International Relations* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017).

theory. In order to intellectuals, idealist created many norms and principles. Wilson Principles are one of them and it will be helpful to explain the structure of idealism. So, the second case will mention about history, background and aims of idealism and critics from realism and liberalism to idealism. In order to these critics, the aim is analysing the cognitive world of the theory from the perspective of other opponent theories to understand failure and gains of idealism to international relations. Some intellectuals believe, idealism was theory in itself and some of them believe it was not theory and even they go further by saying it was nothing more than philosophical idea and utopia such as E.H. Carr. In addition, he was close to realism and it was like the other side of the medallion behind idealism. So, this article is going to make a comparison between realism and idealism. Because according to some discourses idealism lost its effect with the appearance of realism. At the end of the article, the main idea of idealism and its current situation will be understood by looking to the background, history, discourses of idealism and its contributions to international relations.

Idealism with Broad Definition

In the beginning, understanding the background of idealism can be possible through looking to its history. In the 19th century, European system based their policies on balance of power to protect the status quo. They were trying to protect perpetual peace for providing continuity of the great powers in Europe. Nevertheless, there were countries which feel uncomfortable about the situation. Starting from that point, this balance was destroyed and the road to World War I has been constructed. On the other hand, the industrialization of Germany and leaving the UK and France was another problem for that period. Why World War I is mentioned because it has two important dimensions; firstly, it was collectively first big war which entailed humanity to extreme hazard and made financial and emotional damage. Secondly, the collapse of empires and the establishment of new governments were important. Idealism emerged after WWI but

there were power gaps, which created by newly established governments. Actually, perpetual peace did not prove well. This situation caused all possible conditions for WWII.

Regarding the period between the two world war, it can be said even those treaties made by governments do not protect its continuity such as the Versailles Treaty. Indeed, this treaty has shown as the most important reason for WWII. For this reason, idealist intellectuals offered ideas like organizations free from the government in international relations. They started to think about what should be done for prevention of warfare. Between 1920s-1930s, there was the dominance of ideas constructed on understanding the causes of war and how it can be prevented also they questioned the required mechanism for prevention of war. Although idealism was built on the theme of war-peace, which is, in essence, the most important subject of international relations, it attaches importance to the establishment of an 'ideal world order' whose details explained here; since the current or real situation or realities in international relations are negative and bad, they reveal the parameters of an ideal world order.²

Idealism influenced from period's politics on the other hand; it contributed to shaping politics of the period. The most important and prominent political document was "Wilson Principles". This doctrine provided the philosophical basis for President Woodrow Wilson's campaign to put national self-determination at the heart of the 1919 peace settlement.³ Wilson idea was using the USA's accumulation for the common good of mankind; because, according to Wilson, governments' interest was related to nations' state. Despite all his efforts, he couldn't procure acceptance to assembly proposal about the participation of the USA to League of Nations. Some historians criticized Wilson as being realist rather than idealist because they thought the idea of participation to the League of Nations was a political necessity and they also

² Ramazan Gözen, *Theories of International Relations* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017): 71.

³ Peter Wilson, "Idealism in International Relations", *Encyclopaedia of Power*, Australia: Sage Publications, 2011:2.

thought peace will serve to USA's interest. In fact, Wilson was against warfare because according to him wars have no winners. You might win diplomatically but you also have a loss. In that period, Wilson's USA was not a candidate to be great power so they do not have any expectation for any kind of gain from wars under these conditions. Nevertheless, the USA reached to enough political and economic power at that time and Europeans accepted the USA as they will be great power in the future. Despite all the things, today NATO is one of the outcomes of Wilson principles and there are still countries, which want to become a member of NATO. Therefore, it can be said that today idealism has still effect.

Moreover, Wilson Principles began to be implemented after the First World War, but could not be completed successfully. Therefore, Wilson idealism is a failed project. President Wilson's ideas did not receive the support of his own country and the US Congress did not authorize or support Wilson's principles.⁴ These principles are important for the basis of idealism. There are 14 principles but general principles are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 14. Wilson emphasized the sense of justice, which should be accepted by everyone. He defended international cooperation, free trade, democratic governances and establishing perpetual peace through international organizations with equal representations of nations. The League of Nations is an international organization that has emerged in line with such ideals that overlaps with American national interests. Moreover, England and France had the same idea about the establishment of the League of Nations. Their motive was protecting national interests under idealism. League's main aim was developing international cooperation to provide international peace and security. The USA supported the establishment of League at the beginning but it could not become a member and it weakened universality argument. Also, the Soviet Union was not in the League until 1934. The absence of the US and the Soviet Union turned the League into an organization that seeks to protect the interests of Britain and France. After all, the

⁴ Ramazan Gözen, *Theories of International Relations* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017):74.

League was successful to solve problems such as Greece's attack to Bulgaria in the 1920s and broad problem between Turkey and Iraq. However, the League of Nations could not prevent Hitler's expansionist and aggressive policies, Italy's Ethiopia invasion and Soviets intervention into Finland in 1939. England and France preferred to get close relations with Hitler's Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Fascist Italy for providing counter power balance against the Soviet Union rather than working on actualizing institutions and rules of the League of Nations successfully. Thereby, France and Germany acted according to Machiavelli's realism understanding instead of Wilson idealism. Consequently, the balance of power and polarisation occurred in the international system like happened in the First World War and that period caused the Second World War.⁵ The fact that the League of Nations remains as an unsuccessful initiative and has not prevented a new war has led to the questioning of the founding philosophy of the organization.

Subsequently, academicians, intellectuals and philosophers were responsible to educate elites for changing leaders' mind in the future about relations between state and security to change general idea about war. International politics is in need of lecturers for transforming world current situation. These lecturers will have an important influence on the world politics. This process would change states act at the end and will create a more beneficial environment for the citizens. Some intellectuals define the idealism as the white one in all contrasts. Because, idealism says human is good as its nature with its normative perspective. It searches the bad at the system level with its phenomenon. They have to solve these bad things, they see war as the worst thing, and they say it is not because of human nature it is because of environmental aspects. According to idealist intellectuals, the war was kind of disease to international politics. So, idealists take the problem of lack in institutions and order in the international order. They aimed on making the world better with the help of international law and international

⁵ Ramazan Gözen, *Theories of International Relations* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017):81.

organizations. They also predicted controlling tributary units by upper will. Therefore, they mainly mentioned about what should be done not existing condition. They offered upper will because they thought if this kind of power would be obligatory all governments will have peaceful order with social groups through international norms and rules. They also opened themselves to criticism with this argument. In fact, if peoples come together for same purpose they will probably do everything which will be good for their own benefit. While accepting that the different peoples exhibit different codes of behaviour, cultural norms, values, habits and tastes, they contend that human beings are fundamentally uniform. Regardless of ethnic, social, cultural and religious background, all human beings desire the same things in terms of security, welfare, recognition and respect.⁶

In addition to importance of intellectuals in the idealism, it is important to mention those intellectuals created basis of idealist ideas. Philosophers revealed suggestions, which will empower peace and security of international system and government.⁷ Plato and Aristoteles thought the policy as the tool to provide social order, which ensures virtuous life. So, they seen as first philosopher of idealism. This idea reflected to security policies as there is no threats and hostilities in reality and threats occur because of human behaviours. As for that, human behaviours influenced from environment thereby changing of environmental conditions and human behaviours with education are main idealist mentality. Also, Aristoteles says good people make good governments and these good governments shapes society in a good way. Remarkable quality of these idealist theories is start to increase with seeking hope after big declines and great wars. This perspective can be seen in the period after First World War and Second World War while seeking peace. Because of its thesis, idealism generally criticized as utopianism. Philosophers such as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and

⁶ LSE Research Peter Wilson, "Idealism in International Relations", Encyclopaedia of Power, Australia: Sage Publications, 2011:

⁷ Ramazan Gözen, Theories of International Relations (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017):91.

Hugo Grotius produced new ideas and theories for developing international politics.⁸ Origin of the idealism base on dates back to old times and John Locke, Jeremy Bentham, JJ Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, David Hume and John Stuart Mill are important for creating its basis. Idealist ideas shaped by Arnold Toynbee, Norman Angell and Alfred Zimmern. John Locke defends human is peaceable and Voltaire defends monarchies are cause of war and peace can be kept only through democratic republics. Idealist approach acts with ethic and universal phenomenon despite realists' power and nationalist conceptualization. In this context, disarmament, developing democracy, widespread of international organizations developing international law were most popular discourses of idealist intellectuals.

As it is mentioned above, there are many critics to idealism from realism. Contrary to popular wisdom, Marxists were first one criticized not realists. According to Marxists, class conflict affecting international relations, basic factors such as separation of rich and poor and nations do not fit to idealist ideas and they think their thesis is more determinant in shaping relations. They say; WWI happened not because of lack of an institution that can prevent the war but because of inner contradictions of capitalists. Thus, capitalists have to struggle for providing raw material so democracies have warrior character in opposition to idealists. Realists today often criticise the intellectual descendants of inter-war idealists-those e.g. advocating global governance, cosmopolitan democracy, and much greater power for the UN- on much the same grounds. They ignore the power and self-interestedness of the independent nation state, the reign of instrumental (cf. 'abstract') reason in international politics, and the emotional appeal of national sovereignty.⁹ According to Idealists, war is a generally used tool for maximizing governments' benefit. The first step for preventing warfare is averting the method of secret diplomacy, which mostly use between governments. Idealists propose governments

⁸ Ramazan Gözen, *Theories of International Relations* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017):91.

⁹ Peter Wilson, "Idealism in International Relations", *Encyclopaedia of Power*, Australia: Sage Publications, 2011:3.

should use treaties that provide collective and multilateral tools with broad participation rather than bilateral treaties and security precautions including national tools and limited purposes. Realists say, war cannot be prevented with collective security precautions because governments defend acting with collective move is like zero-sum game. Idealist emphasize bilateral relations and say if trade is increased between nations wars will be prevented and all roads will be closed to war. But, realists say there is hierarchical order in international relations and trade and economy does not have place at the top of this hierarchical order. To conclude, idealists believed they can regulate international politics with the help of cooperation in global, international institutions, international law and de-militarization treaties rather than understand realities of policies between nations. Realist discourses power and its role in history and its realities. They separate politics as utopia and reality by saying people should look to reality more than utopia for preventing warfare.

There are loss and gains of idealism to international relations during whole history. The fact that England and France, the great powers of the time, used the League of Nations for their national interests, which established with an idealist perspective, got a big blow in the credibility of the approach. Another gain of idealism was discourse on democracy, human rights and freedom that used by USA in Iraq war, European Union and France for their Libya Operations. Because their main background was idealism. However, some intellectuals said those kinds of discourses used for obscuring government's national interest. In fact, if it would not be ideological tool of European countries, there can be important acquirements. In fact, although idealism regarded as an unsuccessful approach, it has made important scientific contributions to the emergence of international relations as an independent discipline. Learning of democracy, human rights and values such as liberalism by USSR and eastern bloc countries was important step to end of the Cold War period. First World War was biggest destruction of humanity ever lived. This tragic event encouraged intellectuals and political leaders to think

again about conflict, security and warfare. Idealism occurred at that time to prevent another big war. However, idealism used for politics and changed into politics tool beyond ideals. As stated, idealist ideas used by western countries for their national interests. Bearing this thesis in mind there are important gains with the framework of idealism such as development of environmental law, adaptation of sustainable economic growth by other countries, transfer of funds from international funds initially from the World Bank to less developed countries. Speeding of spread of democracy to world and spread of freedom in the context of politics and most importantly empowerment of international law norms day by day are valuable achievements of idealist thought.

In conclusion, 14 Principles, which named as Wilson Principles were important structure of idealist tradition. Although, Idealism is the founding theory of the International Relations discipline, it has minimum number of books, articles and works written in the International Relations literature. The primary reason of that underestimation of idealism by realism and seeing its validity as impossible for international relations.¹⁰ It must be said that idealism has to adapt itself to modern world and build its scientific framework again for starting to increase in international relations theories. In order to get rid of critics such as “utopian” it should influence from approaches and scientific methods of other international relations theories to make new approach.

¹⁰Ramazan Gözen, *Theories of International Relations* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017): 117.

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