**Applying Classical Realism to the Ethio-Eritrean War (1998-200)**

A variant of realism that is one of the most influential school of thought in International Relations is classical realism. The most famous proponents of classical realism are Thucydides, Morgenthau, Machiavelli, Hobbes and most famously from twentieth century are Carr, and Kennan. Classical realism, like other variants of realism considers conflict to be deeply-rooted in international political arena. Three basic differences can be drawn between classical realism and (neo) -or realism and structural realism. First, more attention is given to description of human nature. Secondly, classical realists are more adaptive towards the chances of possibility or role of suspicion, which makes them less optimistic about the ability of the national leaders to predict the behaviour of the state. Thirdly, classical realists have rarely focused on explaining the outcomes of state actions in international political rather they emphasize more on cautioning on the behaviour of the states i.e. what do they do. (Garrett W Brown, 2018)

According to classical realists, international politics is “power politics”, where political actions of state revolve around uses of power, acquisition of power and seeking more means of power. The central themes that encompass power politics are enmity, antagonism, conflict and war exist amongst sovereign states which are contending for their national interest and safeguarding their survival. (Robert H. Jackson, 2007)Though many examples can be found but applying classical realism on Eritrean and Ethiopian war (1998-200), it can be said that a senseless conflict soon turned into a full scale war, when both states engaged in violence against each other, justifying it as an act of protection of a disputed border of Badme. Both states claimed this territory as significant for their country, so neither of them was ready to give up. Thucydides viewed struggle and conflict to be inevitable between Hellas i.e. city states, and between city states and non-Greek neighbouring empires.

Thucydides believed that none were equal to one another in any sense, neither Hellas nor the non-Greek neighbouring empires. The inequality between them was seen as natural, and this inequality was viewed in terms of power and capabilities of the state to dominate others and defend itself from the threats of others. So, whether the state is large or small it must adapt to the inequality of powers between them and thus they must act accordingly. If states act upon this principle they can prosper and survive, otherwise they can jeopardize themselves, which would lead to their destruction. Eritrea gained its independence from Ethiopia in 1993 as a result of a referendum. Despite Eritrea being smaller than Ethiopia in every aspect, for instance in terms of land, population, and economy, Eritrea sent its heavily armed troops with tanks and took over Badme on 12th May 1998, resulting in Ethiopia losing control in the neighbouring towns. (Berk, 2009) It was declared the Ethiopian government same day that “an act of aggression” had been committed by Eritrea, thus it demanded them to remove its troops or Ethiopia would retaliate equally as it will be defending its territory. In this case, both states were among world’s poorest countries, where they spent heavy amount of dollars too fight war and as a result this money was diverted to military expenditure rather than domestic development. Consequence of this heavy spending was that both countries had to face a drought and scarcity of food, as the economy became so weak that it could not support the domestic needs. Before the war, much of trade that Eritrea had was with Ethiopia, and much of the foreign capital that Ethiopia received came from Eritrea. Thus, both were at losing ends, as production of food had stopped and according to the World Factbook Report published in 2006, it dropped as low as 62%. This war destroyed both of the states, because they were already weak and barely surviving and war just made them a hungry state where famine was exacerbating with the time. War resulted in 44% of Ethiopian population malnourished, while in Eritrea the figure was 52%. (Agency, 2006) So, states like Ethiopia, who lack the ability to dominate each other must not engage in such acts of violence as both states were left vulnerable due to the war. Thucydides also emphasizes in his work that the actions which states take have consequences, fruitful or fruitless, which are seen the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea’s decision to go war.

Another tenet of classical realism focuses on prioritizing the military forces of the country i.e. make them stronger. According to this assumption, the best means for states survival rests with a strong military force. During the war years, both Eritrea and Ethiopia, as mentioned above, spent rigorously on their military forces in order to strengthen them, while ignoring the needs of the civilians and domestic projects of developments. When such a situation takes place, the economy of the states starts to weaken. Similar happened in these two countries and nations were starving, famine was growing, and food production, trade and other economic activities came to halt. Both Ethiopia and Eritrea were fragile states, that had weak institutions and were heavily reliant on their military might.

According to Machiavelli, another classical realist, if states fail to pay attention to the threats and fail to guard themselves against these threats, it could result in their destruction. He assumes if world is a dangerous place then simultaneously it also offers opportunity. He cautions the leaders to antedate the motives of rival states and act instead of waiting for the other state to act and in this manner the vigilant leader would fend off the threats. So, the states must be fearful of each other and view their actions suspiciously. (Robert H. Jackson, 2007) In case of Ethiopia and Eritrea, both states had suspicions about one another. On the part of Ethiopia, it was believed that Eritrea was involved and backing the rebel groups and movements in her territory, whereas on the other hand Eritrea believed that Ethiopia was aiming to oust its government. This collective suspicion of nations resulted in aggression and hostilities, thus became an important factor in the eruption of war.

Classical realists assume that international organizations, multinational corporations, NGOs and non-state actors have minimum or no importance in the conduct of international relations, as states are primary actors. A very basic assumption of realism is that states have to rely on self-help, as international system is anarchic where no overriding body exists to enforce law and thus absence on an authoritative international body allows people to act violent by using state as an instrument for practising force at a global level. International organizations failed to prevent the war and causalities. In June 2002, the United Nations and Organization of African Union, diplomatically intervened, and both parties to the conflict agreed to sign a peace agreement in Algeria, which created a buffer zone on the disputed border area. The Algiers Agreement and the Comprehensive Peace Treaty after six months invited United Nations peacekeepers to invigilate the implementation of the treaty, forces were redeployed. This was followed by the creation of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, the goal of this body was to come up with a long-term resolution of the border dispute, which was aimed to be done through arbitration carried out by Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission. (Zondi, 2006) A problem was created, though UNMEE worked in a sensitive way which aimed to involve both the countries beyond the issue of border, national security. But these efforts did not put their insecurity away. UNMEE still had successful peacekeeping missions which worked effectively under the harsh conditions.

In 2005, Eritrea further complicated the working of the UN towards establishing peace when it imposed transport restrictions on the UN, which hindered the freedom of movement of UNMEE, even in the security zones at several occasions. The major challenge to the UN and the working of UNMEE was the lack of cooperation on the end of Ertirea. This signifies that international organziations, in many cases, for their effective working depend upon the cooperation of states. As argued by classical realists, states are the primary actors, who seek power, is manifested in this case.

As for the regional organization, African Union actively participated in mediating the conflict, but its weakness was giving high regards for Ethiopia and thus it failed to stop the war and prevent the situation from further escalation. When such circumstances exist, where one party from the two is being favoured the neglected one loses faith and trust, which was the case of Eritrea, as it had little or no trust in the working of the AU. So, any kind of international efforts pouring in were of no significance, as with the time the stance of both parties became stronger and their rivalry was only getting heated. Thus, the process of reconciliation became nearly impossible.

In the view of classical realists, the primary interest of states is gaining power and to maximise it the states will engage in a never-ending struggle. The states seek power because they believe it guarantees their safety and survival in the international arena, thus they accumulate more resources, so they can build up a stronger army. This leads to conflicting and incompatible interests between neighbours, and they don’t trust each other rather rival states tend to view each other with suspicion. So. states will not act according to morals or principles of ethics as laid down by Christianity, in fact, their decisions will be driven by power, and as they prioritize their self-interests, states would go to war instead of restoring to diplomatic options because they believe that if a state wins the war, advantages would be much more. If this logic is followed, states choose to enter into a war as they see it as their finest option, and if states win the war, they would definitely conquer new lands thus resulting the justification of war and bringing glory to the winning state. When waging a war, states are the only actors responsible for taking entire decision. It is evident in the war of Ethiopia and Eritrea that both states could have resorted to diplomatic channels to resolve their conflict, rather once known as brothers, these two countries went to war and chose their destruction. Both of the states, ignoring the status of power inequality, were seeking to gain power and strength at the cost of each other. Another reason, why states choose to resort to use of force is the absence of an international body or international law, which would stop such hostilities being done on the part of the state by enforcing strict penalties.

The bloodshed and hostility between two states officially came to an end by signing of “Joint Declaration on Peace and Friendship”, which was signed in July 2018. Both states called off the far, and agreed to engage in cooperative interaction, and begin an era of peace and friendship where both former parties to conflict would aim at promoting peace and prosperity in the region as well as across the globe. (Stauffer, 2018)One weakness of classical realism is that with the time circumstances in international politics have changed, and states have evolved thus their goals are ever changing. Now they don’t only focus on strengthening their military, or seeking more power at the expense of other, though it exists still at a certain level, but states now cooperate in international political arena in order to seek mutual benefits, states are now focusing more on economic sector rather than solely on military, so the dynamics and nature of power has shifted from military or politics to economic. Though economic competition still exists, but the nature of struggle has changed. Moreoever, classical realism only holds pessimistic views about the nature of human beings which is responsible for conflict and war and overlooks the historical context or the role of foreign powers. In the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea though it was a struggle of power by acquiring a land, Badme, which had no minerals or any resources, the haphazardly drawn borders by the previous colonial powers was the main reason for a conflict turning into a bloodshed. Humans act according to the situation at hand, though they are selfish and only seek gains for themselves, but the decision of going to war by two weak nations was not only motivated by their selfish nature but many other factors played an equally important role. Since the agreement, both states have been into cordial relations, which is another aspect overlooked by classical realism- the ability to live peacefully.

# Bibliography

Agency, C. I., 2006. *Ertirea,* Washington DC : Central Intelligence Agency .

Berk, T. V. d., 2009. *Realist Paradise: Crises, Conflicts, and Interventions in the Horn of Africa.* Rotterdam: Erasmus University.

Garrett W Brown, I. M. a. A. M., 2018. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations.* 4th ed. New York: Oxford Univeristy Press.

Robert H. Jackson, G. S., 2007. *Introduction to International Rleations: Theories and Approaches.* 3rd ed. New York : Oxford University Press.

Stauffer, H.-U., 2018. Ethiopia & Eritrea Peace Treaty and End of UN-Sanctions. *Afrika-Komitee Basel*, 9 December , p. 4.

Zondi, E. R., 2006. *The Ethiopia-Eritrea Border Conflict and the Role of the International Community.* [Online]   
Available at: https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/%EF%BF%BCthe-ethiopia-eritrea-border-conflict-and-the-role-of-the-international-community/  
[Accessed 26 April 2019].