



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
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Contemporary International Relations Increasingly Integrate National Interest with Ethics, Identity, Emotions and Moral Legitimacy in Foreign Policy

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Recent Developments:

- Recent geopolitical developments, including the **West Asia conflict**, the **Israel–Hamas conflict**, debates over **India's strategic autonomy**, and growing scrutiny of humanitarian crises have revived discussions on whether **International Relations (IR)** should be guided solely by national interest or also by ethics, emotions and moral legitimacy.
- The growing influence of **real-time digital media**, **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, social media and global public opinion has increased demands for ethical accountability in diplomacy while challenging traditional **Realist** approaches to foreign policy.

International Relations Beyond National Interest:

Meaning of International Relations:

- **International Relations (IR)** is the study of interactions among sovereign states, international organisations and non-state actors concerning politics, security, economics, diplomacy and global governance.
- Traditionally, **International Relations** has focused primarily on **power, security, national interest** and the pursuit of strategic objectives by sovereign states.
- Contemporary global politics demonstrates that foreign policy is increasingly influenced by **ethics, identity, public opinion, emotions** and **moral legitimacy**, alongside strategic considerations.

Traditional Approach to International Relations:

- Classical diplomacy emphasises concepts such as **deterrence, balance of power, strategic autonomy, national security** and **realpolitik**.
- The **Realist School** considers states as rational actors seeking survival and maximisation of power under conditions of international anarchy.
- According to **Hans J. Morgenthau**, foreign policy is fundamentally driven by **national interest defined in terms of power**.

Evolution of International Relations:

Historical Development:

- Modern **International Relations** emerged primarily after the **Second World War**, with significant intellectual contributions from Western academic institutions.
- **Stanley Hoffmann** described **International Relations** as "**An American Social Science**", highlighting the dominant influence of American scholarship on the discipline.

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- Modern diplomatic institutions, international norms and theoretical frameworks evolved under the influence of European colonial expansion and later American global leadership.
- The emergence of multipolarity and the rise of the **Global South** have expanded debates on more inclusive and representative approaches to global governance.

Important Concepts in International Relations:

Core Concepts:

- **Realism**, State behaviour is primarily driven by power and national interest.
- **Anarchy**, The international system lacks a central sovereign authority capable of enforcing global laws.
- **National Interest**, The foremost objective guiding a state's foreign policy and strategic decisions.
- **Moral Legitimacy**, Acceptance of state actions based on ethical principles and internationally recognised norms.
- **Strategic Autonomy**, The ability of a country to pursue an independent foreign policy without permanent alignment with competing power blocs.
- **Soft Power**, The ability to influence international behaviour through culture, values, diplomacy and international credibility.

Growing Importance of Ethics and Emotions:

Meaning of Ethics and Emotions:

- **Ethics** refers to moral principles that guide the conduct of states, political leaders and international institutions in global affairs.
- **Emotions** include empathy, fear, pride, anger, grief and compassion that influence perceptions, political judgement and foreign policy choices.
- Contemporary scholarship increasingly argues that **reason** and **emotion** should complement rather than oppose each other in international decision-making.

Scholarly Perspectives:

- **Neta Crawford** argues that emotions such as fear, grief, empathy, pride and embarrassment significantly influence political decision-making and perceptions of national security.
- Emotional responses contribute to shaping national identity, threat perception, public mobilisation and support for military or diplomatic actions.
- **Brent Sasley** argues that state leaders operate within social and political environments where identity and collective emotions significantly shape foreign policy behaviour.

Why Ethics and Emotions Matter in International Relations:

Influence on Foreign Policy:

- Ethical values have historically influenced diplomatic conduct, alliance formation, conflict resolution and international cooperation.
- During the **Cold War**, the **United States** projected itself as the defender of democracy, human rights and individual liberty, while the **Soviet Union** promoted an alternative ideological model.

Influence on Public Opinion:

- Public emotions such as anger, sympathy, fear and national pride increasingly shape governmental responses to international crises.
- Real-time information flows enable citizens to influence foreign policy through democratic pressure and public discourse.

Promotion of Peace and Cooperation:

- Ethical diplomacy strengthens respect for **human rights, human dignity, international law** and peaceful dispute settlement.
- Empathy, mutual trust and moral responsibility encourage international solidarity in addressing common global challenges.

Influence of Ethics and Emotions on World Politics:

Major Dimensions:

- **Decision-making**, Ethical beliefs and emotional responses influence leadership decisions during wars, negotiations and humanitarian emergencies.
- **Conflict and cooperation**, Fear, hatred and insecurity may intensify conflicts, whereas empathy, dialogue and reconciliation facilitate peaceful outcomes.
- **Global norms**, Ethical principles contribute to the development of international treaties, humanitarian law, climate justice frameworks and the doctrine of **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)**.
- **Soft power**, Humanitarian assistance, democratic values, non-violence and cultural diplomacy enhance a country's international image and influence.

Ethical Perspective on Globalisation:

Achievements and Limitations:

- **Globalisation** has promoted international trade, technological progress, investment flows and poverty reduction in many regions.
- Significant inequalities continue to exist between the **Global North** and the **Global South**, limiting equitable distribution of developmental benefits.
- Persistent developmental disparities have raised ethical concerns regarding fairness, inclusion and distributive justice within the global economic order.

Ethics in the Digital Age:

Emerging Dimensions:

- **Artificial Intelligence**, social media, digital journalism, citizen reporting and transnational activism have transformed the conduct of diplomacy.
- Civilian suffering during conflicts has become immediately visible through digital communication platforms, increasing demands for humanitarian accountability.
- Governments increasingly face international scrutiny regarding compliance with **international humanitarian law** and ethical standards during armed conflicts.

Contemporary Challenges in International Relations:

Emerging Issues:

- **National interest versus ethics**, States frequently struggle to balance strategic objectives with humanitarian obligations and international law.
- **Strategic autonomy and global expectations**, Countries such as **India** seek independent foreign policies while responding to competing geopolitical pressures.
- **Humanitarian crises and public opinion**, Conflicts in **West Asia** and **Ukraine** increasingly shape international diplomacy through continuous media coverage.

- **Major power rivalry**, Intensifying competition among major powers has reduced opportunities for effective multilateral cooperation.
- **Technology and information warfare, Artificial Intelligence**, cyberattacks, misinformation and digital surveillance have fundamentally altered diplomatic engagement and national security.
- **Global governance reforms**, Institutions such as the **United Nations** and the **World Trade Organization (WTO)** face increasing demands for reforms that better represent the **Global South**.
- **Non-traditional security threats**, Climate change, pandemics, terrorism, cyber threats and energy insecurity require cooperative global responses beyond conventional military approaches.

India's Perspective on International Relations:

Guiding Principles of Indian Foreign Policy:

- India's foreign policy emphasises **Strategic Autonomy**, **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**, democratic values, pluralism and an anti-colonial worldview.
- India seeks to balance national interest with responsible global engagement through dialogue, multilateralism and peaceful coexistence.
- India supports a **rules-based international order** while preserving independent decision-making in external affairs.

Role of the Non-Aligned Movement:

- The **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** represented sovereign equality, peaceful coexistence, strategic independence and opposition to military bloc politics during the **Cold War**.
- The foundational principles of **NAM** continue to influence India's contemporary doctrine of **Strategic Autonomy**.

India's Moral Capital:

- India's international credibility is strengthened by its constitutional values, democratic institutions, cultural diversity, peaceful coexistence and commitment to the rule of law.
- India's humanitarian assistance, development partnerships and leadership of the **Global South** reinforce its global **Soft Power**.

Constitutional Link:

Article 51 of the Constitution:

- **Article 51** under the **Directive Principles of State Policy** directs the State to promote international peace, security, just and honourable relations among nations and respect for international law.
- The constitutional vision encourages peaceful settlement of international disputes through arbitration and diplomatic engagement.

Illustrative Global Examples:

Ethics in Practice:

- **Mahatma Gandhi's** philosophy of **Non-Violence (Ahimsa)** inspired numerous global civil rights and decolonisation movements.
- **Nelson Mandela's** reconciliation process demonstrated the role of forgiveness and empathy in post-conflict nation-building.
- The collective memory of the **Holocaust** contributed significantly to the development of modern international human rights norms and genocide prevention.

- The global **Climate Justice** movement demonstrates how ethical responsibility and collective emotions influence international environmental negotiations.

Way Forward:

Priority Measures:

- Balance **Realist** national interest with ethical diplomacy and humanitarian commitments.
- Strengthen India's **Soft Power** through democratic governance, inclusive development and cultural diplomacy.
- Preserve **Strategic Autonomy** while actively supporting international humanitarian values and international law.
- Promote equitable, rules-based and representative global governance through stronger leadership of the **Global South**.
- Support comprehensive reforms of international institutions to improve legitimacy, inclusiveness and effectiveness.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Facts for Prelims and Mains:

- **Father of Classical Realism: Hans J. Morgenthau.**
- **International Relations as "An American Social Science": Stanley Hoffmann.**
- **Core Realist Assumption:** States primarily pursue **power**, **security** and **national interest**.
- **Soft Power Concept:** Popularised by **Joseph S. Nye Jr.**
- **Indian Constitutional Provision: Article 51, Directive Principles of State Policy**, promotes international peace, security and respect for international law.
- **Foundational Principle of Indian Foreign Policy: Strategic Autonomy**, evolved from **Non-Alignment** to contemporary **Multi-Alignment**.
- **Major Ethical Global Norms: Human Rights, Responsibility to Protect (R2P), Climate Justice, International Humanitarian Law.**
- **Major Non-Traditional Security Challenges: Climate Change, Pandemics, Cyber Security, Energy Security, Food Security and Artificial Intelligence Governance**