

## NATIONAL INTEREST: PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES

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*“The objectives of foreign policy must be defined in terms of the national interest and must be supported with adequate power.”*

– Hans J. Morgenthau<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*Even though, national interest is one of the most developed concepts of IR scholarship, yet it remains under the debate in academic and policy circles. Various scholars and institutions contextualize and categorize national interests varyingly. There are five main issues under deliberation: first, the interplay of power and morality in formulation and pursuit of national interests; second, longevity, durability and permanency of national interests; third, the interaction between national and public interests, and the process of interest adjudication, which is the function of the political system; fourth, Islamic perspective on national interest; and fifth, the future of national interest in the wake of growing power of the non-state actors, which have started challenging the notion of national interest. This paper revisits the concept and context of national interest with strategic arguments on different debates on national interest. Important attributes of the power potential affecting national interests are considered and conceptualized by the author. The research is descriptive, explanatory, analytical and perspective in nature.*

**Keywords:** National Security, Comprehensive National Security, National Interest, National Power, Elements of National Power

### Introduction

Interest forms to be the nucleus of human relationship from individual to communities, and nations to alliances. The term ‘interest’ is used in multiple ways and with a host of prefixes and suffixes. A few examples

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Joachim Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 561-657.

are personal interest, individual interest, group interest, community interest, ethnic interest, parochial interest, party interest, commercial interest, economic interest, security interest, national interest, etc. While all these phrases are important at the domestic level (and some even at the international level), national interest reigns supreme at national and international levels. National interest is an expression of national purpose, aspirations, and objectives. It is stepping stone to the attainment of national purpose. It explains the state behaviour as to why it is as it is. Over time, it has evolved into one of the most important terminologies in the strategic lexicon of IR and security studies. In most cases, “statesmen think and act in terms of interest.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, one may term it as the currency of international statecraft. According to Hans J. Morgenthau, “It is not only a political necessity, but also a moral duty for a nation to always follow in its dealings with other nations but one guiding star, one standard for thought, one rule for action: The National Interest.”<sup>3</sup>

In the past, national interest was understood as the interest of a sovereign, a monarch, or a dynasty. The Peace of Westphalia (1648) paved the way for new concepts including the phrases signifying national interest. The term was first used during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Italy, France, Germany, and Britain in different ways. American political scientists also used this phrase to explain constitutional matters and the deliberations on political philosophy. Today, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century statesmen, scholars, policymakers, strategists, bureaucrats, diplomats, business leaders, civil society activists, media professionals, and commoners discuss national interest from various angles. What should and what should not be national interest comes under debate in addition to the interplay of national and public interest.

This paper aims at giving a conceptual perspective on national interest. The identification of interests of a particular country goes beyond the purview of the paper. It revisits the concept and context of national interest with strategic arguments on different debates on national interest.

## **National Interest and the School of Political Realism**

Conceptual value and analytical usefulness of national interest have remained under discussion in different schools of thought. Realism is the leading exponent of national interest. The proponents of Realism argue that states seek to maximize power and promote national interests.<sup>4</sup> The realist thinking focuses on ‘nature’ of the three levels to include

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<sup>2</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau quoted in Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 45.

<sup>3</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 241-242.

<sup>4</sup> “National Interest,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/> (accessed May 25, 2014).

international system, state, and individual. In Realism, national interest serves as the nucleus. However, it does not go uncontested. Critics argue that the concept faces serious intellectual and normative challenges. Stanley Hoffman rejects it as being “oversimplified and wrong-headedly dogmatic.”<sup>5</sup> To the proponents of national interest, the most important national interest is the survival of state, including its people, political system, and territorial integrity.

## Defining National Interest

There is no single definition of national interest. It is an abstraction. Anything that is ‘good’ for the nation may be deemed in its interest to attain as long as it serves to attain and maintain the national purpose. With this in view, various forums and individuals have defined national interest varyingly. A few such definitions are following: National interests are the fundamental building blocks in any discussion of foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> (*The Commission on America’s National Interests*)

- National interest is “the general and continuing ends for which a nation acts.”<sup>7</sup> (*Brookings Institution, USA*)
- *Dictionary of Diplomacy*. National interest “is deemed by a particular state to be a “vital or desirable goal in its international relations.”<sup>8</sup> (*Dictionary of Diplomacy*)
- National interests are the most important wants and needs of a nation. At the highest level of abstraction, national interests are the “wellspring” from which national objectives, policy and strategy flow.<sup>9</sup> (*National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad, Pakistan*)
- National interests may be defined as “desired end states based on values and strategic analysis. Expressed as policies.”<sup>10</sup> (*The US Army War College*)
- “What is good for the nation as a whole in international affairs” is national interest and “what is good for the nation as a whole in domestic affairs is the public interest.”<sup>11</sup> (*Michael G. Roskin.*)

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, *Primacy or World Order: American Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 131.

<sup>6</sup> The Commission on America’s National Interests, *America’s National Interests* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, July 1996), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Harold J. Clem, *The Environment of National Security* (Washington DC: National Defense University, 1983), 26.

<sup>8</sup> G. R. Berridge and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2001), 164.

<sup>9</sup> *Statecraft and Strategy, vol II* (Islamabad: National Defence University, 2010-11), 147.

<sup>10</sup> J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr. ed., *US Army Guide to National Security Issues, Vol I: Theory and Strategy of War* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012), 48.

- *Charles Lerche and Abul Said*. National interest is “the general long-term and continuing purpose which the state, the nation, and government all see themselves as serving.”<sup>12</sup> (*Charles Lerche and Abul*)
- National interest is an interest which the states seek to protect or achieve in relation to each other.<sup>13</sup> (*Vernon Van Dyke*)

## Categorizing National Interest

Various scholars and institutions have categorised and classified national interest varyingly. Categorization and classification is aimed at informing the policymakers on the extent of significance of a given issue. It is also meant to underscore the intensity as to how much should a state care for an interest, what should be the extent of means used to attain an interest, and the decision on the ways. In other words, categorization provides a gauge for cost-benefit analysis as well as an operational framework for dealing with this subject.

Some of the phases and terminologies used while categorising interests include: core, vital, very important, extremely important, important, less important, primary, secondary, permanent, specific, general, and peripheral. A few sets are discussed below.

**Thomas W. Robinson’s Classification:** Thomas W. Robinson has broadly classified national interests into six categories:<sup>14</sup>

- *Primary Interests*. These include the preservation of physical, political, and cultural identity of the state against encroachments from outside powers.
- *Secondary Interests*. These are less important than the primary interests though quite vital to the existence of the state.
- *Permanent Interests*. These refer to the relatively constant and long-term interests of the state. The change in the permanent interests is rather slow.
- *Variable Interests*. These refer to the interests of a nation, which are considered vital for national good in a given set of circumstances.
- *General Interests*. These refer to those positive conditions which apply to a large number of nations or in a several

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<sup>11</sup> Michael G. Roskin, “National Interest: From Abstraction to Strategy,” *Strategic Studies Institute*, US Army War College, (May 20, 1994): 1.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Lerche and Abul Said quoted in Rumki Basu, ed., *International Politics: Concepts, Theories and Issues* (New Delhi: SAGE Publication, 2012), 54.

<sup>13</sup> Vernon Van Dyke cited in Urmila Sharma and S.K. Sharma, ed., *Principles and Theory In Political Science, vol 1* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2007), 126.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas W. Robinson, quoted in Urmila Sharma and S.K. Sharma, “Western Political Thought,” (Washington: Atlantic Publishers, 2006)127-128.

specified fields such as economics, trade, diplomatic, intercourse etc.

- *Specific Interests.* Through the logical outgrowth of the general interest, specific interests are defined in terms of time or space, and are ended with change in environment.

In addition to the above, Robinson mentions three other interests which he calls “international interests.” These include identical interests, complementary interests, and conflicting interests.<sup>15</sup>

**Joseph Frankel’s Classification:** Joseph Frankel proposed a classification of the uses of the term ‘national interest’ into ‘aspirational’, ‘operational’, ‘explanatory’ and ‘polemical’.<sup>16</sup>

**Categorization by the Commission on America’s National Interests.** The Commission on America’s National Interests, in its July 2000 report on America’s National Interests identified a hierarchy interests as follows: vital interests, extremely important interests, important interests, and less important or secondary interests.<sup>17</sup>

The Commission on America’s National Interests summarizes interest under these four categories but identifies five world regions of interest as follows: (1) China, Japan, and East Asia, (2) Russia, (3) Europe and NATO, (4) the Middle East, and (5) the Western Hemisphere.

**US Army War College’s Categorization:** The US Army War College, in its official academic guide on national security issues, categorizes national interests considering the intensity of important and application as survival, vital, important and peripheral interests.<sup>18</sup>

**National Defence University (NDU) of Pakistan’s Categorization:** The NDU Pakistan’s academic guide for the students of national security and war course categorizes national interests as vital, most important, important, and peripheral.<sup>19</sup>

## Power-Focused vis-à-vis Morality-Based Interests

A great debate goes on as to whether it is legitimate to pursue national interest *sans* morality. For instance, if a nation’s survival is threatened from within or outside, it needs to take actions which may be detrimental to the values of humanity, morality, and national ethos—thereby putting human security in jeopardy at the cost of state security.

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<sup>15</sup> A perspective on conflicting interests of the US and Russia in the Ukraine crisis in 2014 in Robinson quoted in Urmila Sharma and S.K. Sharma, quoted in Robinson(128).

<sup>16</sup> Peu Ghosh, *International Relations* (New Delhi: PHI Learning, 2013), 65.

<sup>17</sup> The Commission on America’s National Interests (July 2000), 2.

<sup>18</sup> J. Boone Bartholomees, 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> *Statecraft and Strategy, Vol II*, 147.

Realism is one such school of thought that virtually approves of the attainment of national interest at all costs. On the other hand, liberals consider advancement of national interest through the values of cooperation, collaboration, and mutuality.

It is a contest between power and morality. Power is the focal point in national interest. It is the essence of national interest. It creates a clash of interest between states *sans* morality. However, in practice, power and morality go hand in hand. States endeavour to maximize power through advancement of national interest but cooperation in the spheres of human security and human rights, economic collaboration, and spread of values like democracy and freedom go on concurrently. Thus, power *sans* morality would crumble, and morality *sans* power is an impracticable proposition.

Interstate relations in today's world are no more as compartmented to have total enmity or complete friendship between different countries. Due to the nature of national interest and the complexity of interstate relations, states make a choice for complex interdependence in a rapidly evolving world wherein contest, competition, and confrontation between them take place in concert with conformity, cooperation, and collaboration. All are aimed at attaining the national interest in the most desired and effective manner.

National interest is the interplay of all these facets that lead to the attainment of national ends i.e., interests. For instance, trade cooperation between India and China continues alongside strategic rivalry between them in the Indian Ocean region and elsewhere. They have many longstanding territorial and non-territorial conflicts: a few to cite are India-China Aksai Chin Conflict, India-China Sikkim Conflict, and India-China Arunachal Pradesh/South Tibet Conflict. Both fought a major war in 1962 and their standing armed forces are deployed since along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). They have had military clashes during the recent years. However, while maintaining the state of contest and conflict over the aspects they disagree, they are cooperating and collaborating in the area of mutual benefit.

The same is true in the case of the US and Russia. They continue to cooperate on several issues while contending with each other on others. At any rate, the power-focused interests, being linked with the survival and security of the state itself, are of primary importance and the morality-based interests, often being linked with cooperation to and from other states, are secondary in importance. Power maximization is blamed only when it is pursued at the cost of human blood. On the contrary, morality cannot be exercised at the cost of national security. In the words of Henry Kissinger, "We cannot abandon national security in pursuit of virtue."<sup>20</sup> In

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<sup>20</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 1072.

the final analysis, both lead to the single end: attainment of national interest.

Interests of states are also crisscrossed by the interests of many supra-state, sub-state, and non-state actors and entities. A few to mention are as follows: international organizations, regional organizations, multinational corporations, state institutions including military forces, political parties, militant organizations, interest groups, pressure groups, religious entities, super-empowered individuals, media conglomerates, amongst others. All these entities have their interests. In some cases, these actors are more powerful than many of the states and thus have both constraining and enabling effect on their national interests.

### **Are National Interests Permanent?**

Existence and survival falls into the category of permanent interests. However, there are other interests that change with time. Likewise, there are interests that advance the security interest of a state and help it maximize its power; there are others that are based on its values, national purpose, ideological leaning, and public aspirations. There are three different views on this issue. First, national interests are permanent. Those holding this view often quote such maxims as from Lord Palmerston: "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal, and those interests it is our duty to follow."<sup>21</sup> However, Palmerston did not refer to permanent nature of a given national interest. He only referred to the significance of interests while using the words "eternal" and "perpetual." *Second*, most scholars and statesmen believe that national interests do adjust to the varying situations. Evens and Newnham believe in changing nature of national interest during different times, under different circumstances and with different policymakers leading a nation state.<sup>22</sup> Morgenthau also believes in adjustable nature of interests. He argues that the interest cannot have "meaning that is fixed once and for all."<sup>23</sup>

Let us take an example from the Cold War. It was in the national interest of the former Soviet Union to spread communism across the world. The Cold War is over. The Soviet Union does not exist anymore. Its main successor, the Russian Federation, struggling with the disintegration after-shocks, has changed the system at home and the pursuits abroad. Although the spread of communism is not its core national interest, it is striving to attain and retain the status of a major power in Eurasia and the world at large. Similarly, the US interest to contain communism does not

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<sup>21</sup> Adolphus William Ward and George Peabody Gooch, eds., *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 160.

<sup>22</sup> A detailed view can be found in Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham (1998).

<sup>23</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 4th Ed, 8.

exist anymore. Pakistan's interest that the people of Kashmir should get the right of self-determination in the form of plebiscite in keeping with the UN Security Council Resolutions on the subject would cease to exist as soon as it so happens. However, Pakistan's interest for national integration and security against internal and external threats cannot subside under any circumstances.

Third, yet others argue that some interests are permanent. These interests enjoy timeless value, universal applicability, and non-negotiable status such as survival, security, and sovereignty of the state. National values and wellbeing of the populace also fall in the same category but they may have to be overlooked under special circumstances e.g., in times of war when the survival of state is threatened and is to be safeguarded.

### **Attributes of the Power Potential Affecting National Interests**

Ten key attributes of a nation state's power potential that influence the makeup, definition, and determination of its national interest are: geography, history, demography, political system, military strength, economic capacity, technological base, interest adjudication at domestic level, international environment, and national morale including public opinion.

### **Interest and National Values**

National interest has a strong relationship with core national values. Each nation looks forward to protect its values at home and abroad. National interest thus personifies national values in expressive and normative terms. The blend of American values and national interest provides an apt example of this. Marybeth Ulrich notes:

American interests since colonial times flow from American values. The roots of these values and their preservation as the primary national interest. This unique heritage may at times make it difficult to separate American values and interests, thus leading to the simultaneous pursuit of seemingly conflicting interests. This phenomenon continues to manifest itself in modern-day foreign policy dilemmas, such as when the United States is torn between promoting democracy and facilitating a stable international order.<sup>24</sup>

This denotes that both liberty and security are in the interest of a people or state. None can be relegated or neglected. The acme of leadership dexterity lies in balancing the both. This would also work toward striking a balance between national and public interests. Security

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<sup>24</sup> Marybeth P. Ulrich, "American Values, Interests, and Purpose: Perspectives on the Roots of American Political and Strategic Culture," in *US Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Volume II: National Security Policy and Strategy*, 9.



in some cases and at some point in the history of nations becomes synonymous to liberty, freedom, independence, and survival of states and societies. To this end, Barry Buzan notes:

Security is taken to be about the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change, which they see as hostile. The bottom line of security is survival, but it also reasonably includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence.<sup>25</sup>

### **Justification of the Means and Ends (National Interests)**

The concept and practice of national interest does not recede even within the boundaries of nation-state. With other notions like sovereignty, integrity, legitimacy, and authority shaping fast due to the emerging realities and the effects of globalization, the conceptions of nation and interest *per se* are also transforming. What is national interest and what it is not remains a matter of debate. The idea of protecting national interest vis-à-vis other nations at “all costs” cannot be applied in the same fashion at home. The ends cannot justify the means in inland processes. The means also have to be justified. The instruments of statecraft, especially the hard power such as military forces, cannot be applied without the qualms of conscience. Indiscriminate use of force in the name of national interest to kill, torture, and imprison all those who are against the misuse of political power and privileges of the ruling classes is a dangerous proposition.<sup>26</sup> The concept of minimum use of force must be applied to deal with a domestic challenge including pacification of an internal threat posed by the rebels or insurgents. Even to repel an external threat, proportionate rather than maximum use of force or fire—proportional to the challenge—is to be employed. Indiscriminate scale or enormity of means to meet or maintain a national interest or objective can be questioned both from home and abroad. Thus, the reality needs to subsist within the folds of morality, legality and legitimacy.

The means apart, the ends too need to pass the test of reason and rationality. National interests of a state are often at odds with those of the other states. This points to hurting the interest of a counterpart in an attempt to attain its zero-sum outcome. Is that rational? Certainly not, but Realism-based interstate relationship is claimed to have founded on realities rather than rationalities. Yet, ‘might’ cannot be ‘right’ in all cases and under all circumstances. State security cannot take precedence over

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<sup>25</sup> Barry Buzan, “New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-first Century,” *International Affairs*, 67.3 (1991): 432-433.

<sup>26</sup> For a sound perspective on the issue, Raja Saim-ul-Haq Satti, “Understanding the ‘National Interest’?” *Islamic Research Foundation International, Inc*, <http://www.irfi.org/articles2/> (accessed March 8 2014).

human security whether it is the case of a state's own populace or the residents of another state. The value of national interest cannot hyperbolically outweigh the worth of public interest. If it does, it has a cost. After all, nations are made up of people. The interests of people are analogous, although they may belong to different states. The interest of humanity cannot be put into jeopardy for the sake of state interests. The answer may be found in calibrating the national interests with the public requirements.

### **Formulation of National Interests**

Considering the function of postmodern international state system, it is important for a nation-state to determine its national interest. Certainly, there are interests such as sovereignty and survival, which cannot be negotiated or compromised. There are others which need to be reviewed and reappraised regularly. On this, Robert J. Art observes.

The most fundamental task in devising a grand strategy is to determine a nation's national interests. Once they are identified, they drive a nation's foreign policy and military strategy; they determine the basic direction that it takes, the types and amounts of resources that it needs, and the manner in which the state must employ them to succeed. Because of the critical role that national interests play, they must be carefully justified, not merely assumed.<sup>27</sup>

Henry Kissinger, too, is convinced that the identification of national interests is crucial for the development of policy and strategy.

Hypothetically, national interests are rooted in the history, values and aspirations of a nation and are indirectly identified by the entire nation through an informal process which may involve an extended debate. However, practically, the government being the vanguard of a nation, determines its interests. Alan Stolberg notes, "For the US, the executive branch of the federal government has primary responsibility for determining the national interests that address perceived needs and aspirations external to the geographic borders of the nation."<sup>28</sup> However, "the determination of internal or domestic interest", he notes "is more complex with executive and legislative bodies at federal, state, and local levels interacting in the political process to reach decisions."<sup>29</sup> But public interest is aggregated and articulated through a lengthy process and is a function of the political system of the country.

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<sup>27</sup> Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 45.

<sup>28</sup> Alan G. Stolberg, "Crafting National Interests in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," in *US Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Volume II: National Security Policy and Strategy*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

## Interest and the Units of Analysis of IR

Interest can be studied at supra-national and intra-national plane in the light of the units of analysis given by Buzan, Waever, and Wilde. This way, 'Interest' is relevant to the *international subsystems* (groups or units such as EU, SAARC, ASEAN, and SCO etc.), *individual units* (actors such as communities, ethnicities, intrastate political entities, and multinational corporations), *subunits* (e.g., institutions and groups within the units such as lobbies, bureaucracy, corporate sectors organizations, trade unions, and other meso level establishments).<sup>30</sup>

## Interests of the Constituent Units

In some cases, interest of the constituent units of a nation e.g., states or provinces gains precedence over the national interest. It becomes difficult for a nation when these constituents start pursuing their interest even by dealing with foreign countries directly. The First American Republic from 1776 to 1789 was a case in point. To this end, Marybeth P. Ulrich notes:

The US constitution was adopted from 1781 to 1789. The first Constitution of the United States as embodied in the Articles reflected something of an idealized view of American political philosophy. Under the Articles, the United States were a loose confederation of independent states ... The powers to impose taxes or to raise troops were reserved to the individual states ... It was clear that the weak central government established under the Articles was unable to prevent war, mount and sustain military operations should war occur, or even prevent internal rebellion. ... Their aversion to sending taxes to Congress is also well known. States were even conducting their own foreign policy with external countries, despite the fact that the Articles strictly forbade such actions.<sup>31</sup>

## Adjudication of Public Interest

Adjudication of intrastate public interest is a function of political system steering the affairs of a given state. Interest forms to be the central section in the string of a political process. Almond and Coleman listed seven functions of all political systems: political socialization, interest articulation, interest aggregation, political communication, rulemaking, rule application and rule adjudication. <sup>32</sup> It is evident that 'interest' is the

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<sup>30</sup> A detailed perspective may be found in Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Marybeth P. Ulrich, "American Values, Interests, and Purpose," 6-7.

<sup>32</sup> Gabriel Almond and James S. Coleman, ed., *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960) and John R. Fisher, "System Theory and Structural Functionalism," in John T Ishiyama and Marijke

core of the entire system. The process of political socialization integrates people into the political structure and culture of a state. This sets in motion a process of interest articulation and aggregation, which passes through the stage of political communication and eventually turns into rules. It leads to interplay of rule application and adjudication. This denotes that the public interests are adjudicated even during the course of application. Let us glance over the focal part: interest articulation and interest aggregation.

*Interest Articulation:* Gabriel Almond *et al.* define interest aggregation as, “the process by which individuals and groups make demands upon the political decision makers that we call interest articulation.”<sup>33</sup> In characterizing the interest articulation function in a political system and in comparing it with other political systems, we need to identify four main types of structures involved in the process: institutional interest groups, non-associational interest groups, anomic interest groups, and associational interest groups.<sup>34</sup>

*Interest Aggregation:* Gabriel Almond *et al.*, define interest aggregation as “the activity in which the political demands of groups and individuals are combined into policy programs.”<sup>35</sup> For example farmers’ demand from higher crop prices, public preferences for lower taxes, environmentalists’ demand for natural resource quality, and the interests of the businessmen often have to be balanced while determining an economic program. Interest aggregation also includes the tools and techniques used by the individuals on the way of personal interest aggregation, and by the groups or communities to meet shared interests.

## Choices with the Smaller Nation-States

Theoretically, to pursue national interest in accordance with aspiration and national purpose is the right of each nation-state. International law and ethos endorse equality between states. Practically, however, the case of smaller and weaker nation-states is different from powerful states. Smaller nations often accept infringement of their sovereignty by the stronger states to remain viable territorially as well as politically. For instance, whereas dominant states can use coercive diplomacy as a tool to advance their interests, smaller nations cannot go beyond cooperation, collaboration, and persuasion to save their national

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Breunin, ed., *21<sup>st</sup> Century Political Science: A Reference Handbook* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2011), 76.

<sup>33</sup> Gabriel Almond *et al.*, *Comparative Politics Today: A World View* (London: Longman, 2010, 9<sup>th</sup> ed), 79.

<sup>34</sup> Howard J. Wiarda, *Comparative Politics: Critical Concepts in Political Science, Vol 1* (London: Routledge, 2005), 184.

<sup>35</sup> Gabriel Almond, *Comparative Politics Today*.

interests from being hurt. At times, they even have to submit to the demands of stronger states. Thus, national interests of smaller, and weaker states are indirectly linked with the interests of powerful states.

## Islamic Perspective on National Interest

Islamic perspective on national interest is linked with the Islamic concepts of nation, state, and sovereignty. As for sovereignty, the Holy Quran notes: "Sovereignty belongs to none but Allah."<sup>36</sup> However, the man has been delegated to exercise the authority based on the commands of Allah (SWT), Who is Lord of the universe. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan puts it into perspective as: "Sovereignty over the entire Universe belongs to Almighty Allah [SWT] alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Pakistan within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust."<sup>37</sup>

Islam considers Muslims as an *Ummah* i.e., nation as a whole *sans* politico-territorial boundaries. Thus, the security and prosperity of the entire Muslim community, otherwise part of any state, is in the *Ummah's* interest. However, today's international system is made up of about 193 nation-states and a number of self-governing, autonomous and semi-autonomous states and regions. Muslims are living virtually in all states of the world. The largest Muslim organization, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), has 57 member states. Viewed from this angle, the pursuance of national interest in accordance with the popular concept of international relations in vogue is not un-Islamic, if it does not otherwise contradict the Islamic commands and injunctions in any way and does not put the security of the Muslim people into jeopardy.

## The Constitution of Pakistan and 'Interest'

The constitution is the quintessence of national interest of a country. According to Morgenthau, the idea of national interest in general resembles the constitution of the US and "its content can run the whole gamut of meanings which are logically compatible with it [i.e., national interest]." <sup>38</sup> Pakistan is no exception. In the Constitution of Pakistan, the word "interest" appears 65 times signifying in 16 different characters even

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<sup>36</sup> Al-Quran, 12:40, Translation by Justice Mufti Taqi Usmani.

<sup>37</sup> Preamble to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

<sup>38</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, "Another 'Great Debate': The National Interest of the United States," *The American Political Science Review*, XLVI (December, 1952), 972, cited in Ken Kiyono, "A Study of Concept of the National Interest of Hans J. Morgenthau: As the Standard of American Foreign Policy," *Nagasaki University's Academic Output Site*, Japan, [http://naosite.lb.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/10069/27783/1/keieikeizai49\\_03\\_04.pdf](http://naosite.lb.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/10069/27783/1/keieikeizai49_03_04.pdf) (accessed March 11, 2014).

though the prefix “national” has not been used with “interest”.<sup>39</sup> It has been mentioned in such terms as public interest, interests of minorities, interest of sovereignty, interest of services, interest of the glory of Islam and general interest of people.

The State shall endeavour to preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim

### **The Future of National Interest**

The future of national interest is essentially linked with the future of nation-state system. A few notions hitherto monopolized by the nation-state have been challenged by various sub-state elements such as civil society, academia, intelligentsia, media, corporate sector, societal elite, and even the educated commoners. *Inter alia*, national interest, too, is under debate. There are sections of international civil society that advocate preferring public interest over national interest, and human security over state security. This also denotes that in certain cases national interest and public interest cannot be moderated or aggregated and thus cannot move onto a converging axis. Thus public interest is gaining against national interest outpacing national interest both ontologically and phenomenological.

State is no more the sole constituent or building block of the international system. There are a number of other actors that have taken over several roles earlier possessed and performed by the state. Such actors exist in all continents, regions, and states of the world. Likewise, these elements are playing their role across all spheres of human life ranging from super empowered individuals to interest and pressure groups, and governmental and nongovernmental organizations of various kinds to multinational corporations with worldwide presence.

The theories of international relations (IR) and security studies, particularly the different variants of Realism and the related ideals refer to a challenger in the system. A rising power, often a state discontented with its share in existing distribution of power in the system, poses a challenge to the superpower(s) or major power(s) to attain a rightful share and status. The challenge evolves manifold. The non-state challenge posed by sub-state, supra-state, and sans-state actors has a synergetic effect toward the decay of the state power. The monopoly, legitimacy, authority, supremacy, and sovereignty of state have been challenged both in moral and functional realms. There are people, groups, and organizations which have taken over the jobs earlier understood as inexorable functions of the states, not in rhetoric but in essence. Let us take example of a vital national interest. Arguably, the most important national interest of any state is its security against existential internal and external threat. Defence and security policies and military strategies are formulated to ensure security

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<sup>39</sup> All reference to the Constitution given from relevant articles as indicated.

and sovereignty. These policies and strategies are backed by adequate means – military and non-military – which call for allocation of compatible budgetary allocations.

In the post state of nature times, the human society has experienced various kinds of rules and governance. Whereas better part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century mankind is under democratic governance of various shades and grades, some of the states are still under dictatorial or monarchical regimes. While national interest has the same meanings in case of such regimes too as are for democratic states, the application of the idea is different in that its primary function is the survival of the regime and not the security of the state or wellbeing of its people. State security is linked with the safety of the ruling elite. The wellbeing of the people is not among the top priorities. This practice cannot continue indefinitely in future.

The civil societies have started questioning the defence spending on moral grounds considering the poverty and deprivation among masses and other human insecurities. Parsimonious allocations to human security – the sphere of public interest – and extravagant allotment of resources, as viewed by the liberal civil societies, for states security needs, the domain of national interest, is being constantly criticized especially in the states wherein human security situation is unstable. Analytical comparisons are often drawn between defense and development budgets, and questions raised regarding the necessity of the former when people of the state need more. This is but one example. Other national interests, vital or otherwise, are also facing questions. The entire decision-making process and the determinants of national interest remain under the scrutiny of the non-state actors that often influence the decisions and limit the choices of the states. Similarly, both the structural and functional aspects of the states are also coming under debate. However, the chief proponents of national interest, Realist scholars and statesmen, study the concept with little reference to moralistic reasoning, due to the key role played by human nature as the classic Realist believe and international structure as the Neorealist uphold, in an environment of international anarchy. A priori hypotheses on national interest rooted in theoretical conceptions are being overruled by the determinants of public interest founded on empirical deductions.

Non-state actors are gaining status equilibrium with the states in some spheres and are influencing the state behaviour in other areas. A few non-state actors have more global outreach as compared to states. They have stronger economic backbone, added credibility, more influence, and a better bargaining power in the international system than most of the states. To be true, the powerful states and state actors are keeping the case of states alive and dynamic. Otherwise, the heavyweight non-state actors would fast erode the role, repute and status of power of the states. Yet again, the states are dependent on so many non-state actors in so many

aspects that they often feel helpless before them and their national interests remain hostage to these dependencies. This vulnerability of the states is increasing with each tick-of-the-clock due to the reason that the non-state entities have fewer liabilities towards the masses compared with the states that owe a whole heap of responsibilities and thus accountabilities. Thus, with the passage of time, national interests of weaker states in the system are steadily reducing to a point where it remains no more than a footnote to the interests of major powers and the powerful non-state actors. Besides, the intensity of national interest notwithstanding, which may be analogous in case of all states, sanctity or inviolability of the bounds of national interest are different in case of different states depending on the power of a given state.

Realist theorists such as Morgenthau view national interest in a bond with power and explain why states behave as they do. If it is taken as true, it is reasonable to believe that the declining sway of national interest owes much to the declining power of the state in face of the non-state challengers. Does this mean that the state would need to attain and maintain balance of power against the non-state contenders too, at least in non-traditional and non-military spheres? It is a new catch-22 particularly for the otherwise weaker states. In this case too, the concept of national interest comes under threat.

Another tight spot for the national security is its relative subjectivity compared with the public interest, which can be interpreted better and can be translated into a normative-functional paradigm for implementation. It may be noted that no state or its inhabitants may be bothered about the national interest of another state. However, public interest and human security issues of people of any state can sensitize the entire international community irrespective of caste, creed, region, religion, or color of skin. Thus, national interest does not always pass the test of morality when pitched against public interest. The answer may be found in keeping it aligned with the interest of populace and not tangent to it.

The notion of internationality embedded in the concept of national interest keeps it aloof from domestic concerns. It looks at the internal construct and dynamics as means and instruments of power to realize national interests rather than the resources that can be employed for collective good of the nation. This too raises the eyebrow of morality.

On the other hand, the constructive side of the national interest draws on a sense of nationhood, national identity and national purpose. Identity is one of the strongest linkages of an individual or group. Nationhood brings people from all socioeconomic classes onto the platform of a same single identity. Thus, it also works towards a common national interest. Eventually, if well aggregated and adroitly moderated by the national leadership keeping the civil society and interest groups on board, national and public interests may epitomize both the will of nation



and its populace. Due to this, national interest would and should retain its function at all three levels of international relations.

## Conclusion

Even though composed of human beings, the character of states is unlike human souls. Human beings keep forth their interest only to the extent that they serve them and their kith and kin well. If they have to choose between their friends and the interests, they might decide on the former. The case of states is different. More often than not, they pick out the latter. The assertion of Lord Palmerston, a renowned statesman of 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the House of Commons in 1848, bears testimony to the fact: "It is a narrow policy to suppose that this country or that country is to be marked out as the eternal ally or the perpetual enemy of England. We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal, and those interests it is our duty to follow."<sup>40</sup>

National interest is likely to continue to play an important role not only in the interstate relations but also in the intrastate relations in the future international system. Thus, understanding the process and interplay of national interests is of prime importance for scholars, policymakers, peace and security analysts, military strategists, and students of IR and other related disciplines.

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<sup>40</sup> Ward and Gooch, 160.

