

Review: Politics Among Nations

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In the pantheon of International Relations (IR) theory rests the work of Prof. Hans Morgenthau. The esteemed University of Chicago professor is considered a pioneer in academic discourse related to IR theory, and is among the fathers of the modern Realist school. In his seminal work, Politics Among Nations, Morgenthau systematically outlines the fundamentals of diplomacy, its role in statecraft and foreign policy and his perception of its decline. He clearly defines diplomacy's role in establishing and maintaining peace, and focuses on the three channels of action available in diplomacy: persuasion, compromise, and threat of force- while highlighting their integral interplay.

Beginning with his conception that the path for permanent peace is found via accommodation driven by diplomacy, he then outlines the four tasks of diplomacy: a) diplomacy must determine its objectives in light of the power available for the pursuit of said objectives; b) diplomacy's role in assessing the objectives of other nations, especially in light of their power available; c) diplomacy's determination to the degree that such varied objectives are compatible; and d) diplomacy's employment of suitable means for achieve such objectives. Morgenthau notes that the failure in any of these dimensions may endanger the efficacy of foreign policy and the overall state of peace in the international system.

Next, he outlines the two instruments of diplomacy in an evocative description: the foreign offices at home-the brains, where policy is devised, and the diplomatic representatives abroad-the eyes, ears and mouth, as well as fingertips. He continues with describing the three roles of the diplomat abroad, describing their roles in symbolic, legal and political representation, and the various functions therein. Morgenthau weaves a brief history of diplomatic representatives and highlights that diplomatists have made significant contributions to the cause of peace.

Finally, Morgenthau focuses on the present decline of diplomacy. Again, he systematically outlines the five factors for diplomacy precipitous decline: a) the development of modern communications; b) the depreciation of diplomacy; c) diplomacy by parliamentary procedure; d) the bi-polar world inhabited by the two superpowers of his age, the US and USSR; and e) the nature of contemporary international politics.

In assessing Morgenthau's views on diplomacy, the author takes a rather holistic approach to the craft, with a real focus on all components that comprise the field. He gives clear deference to balancing compromise, persuasion and threat of force. Perhaps it is the wide view of the role of diplomacy in maintaining peace that is so striking. Subsequent Realist theorists tend to get so caught up in notions of hard power that they lose focus on the diplomacy that Morgenthau so clearly values. Morgenthau's appreciation of the role of diplomacy in maintaining stability in international order, and his attempts to calibrate power and peace through diplomacy would seemingly put him at odds with so-called present day Realists who often fall off-kilter with an overemphasis on power alone.