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2 **The National Interest and Global Justice: Contradictory**
3 **Terms, Incomparable and Non-commensurable Goods,**
4 **Yet Compatible?**

5 **Ariel Colonomos¹**

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8 **Abstract**

9 Prima facie, the pursuit of national interest stands in contradiction with the rules of
10 global justice. Indeed, the former relies upon selfishness and the maximization of
11 national utility, while the latter presupposes distributive measures at the global level that
12 exercise some constrain on state behavior. However, these two notions are open to inter-
13 pretation and, sometimes, even lack clarity. This paper will look for clarification and will
14 ask whether it is possible to go beyond the radical difference between those two logics.
15 I will start by underlining the reasons why the national interest and global justice are in
16 contradiction with each other. Although they are not commensurable, the paper will then
17 argue the two can be compatible in specific equilibriums of international politics, I will
18 refer to as the “rationalist” and the “revolutionist” modes. Finally, the paper will discuss
19 whether, in the best of all possible worlds, we should strive for this compatibility.

20 **Keywords** International politics · International relations theory · Global justice ·
21 National interest · Commensurability · Realism

22 The speech by the US representative is particularly strange to me; she gave her
23 speech as if she was Mother Teresa herself. Please, remember which country
24 you represent! Please, remember the track record of your country.

25 Vitaly Churkin, Russia’s representative at the UN, responds to Samantha
26 Power at the Security Council and to her accusations regarding Russia’s
27 involvement in Syria (New York, December 2016).

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28 1 Introduction: A Dyadic Relationship

29 The national interest and global justice are two frameworks that both come from
30 rich and sometimes complex traditions and have travelled along different historical
31 and conceptual paths. These trajectories, however, overlap, since, in theory as well
32 as in practice, the national interest and global justice are deeply entangled. Indeed,
33 they form a complex dyad and are complimentary to each other. Whether they stand
34 in opposition to each other or they are two constitutive parts of one single foreign
35 policy, one presupposes the other.

36 The opposition thesis is very well-known. There is a gap between the national
37 interest and global justice. It is often believed that a country following its national
38 interest cannot foster global justice. Conversely, because it must also provide care
39 to other people than its own, a state that acts in favor of global justice would have
40 to put aside its national interest. Such gap does not preclude the fact that one is the
41 anti-thesis of the other and that therefore there is a strong connection between the
42 two.

43 The case for compatibility has also been made. Combining the national inter-
44 est and global justice, or rather “reconciling” the two, is a matter of pragmatism,
45 because this dual approach would grant legitimacy to political decision. Domesti-
46 cally, a state is responsible for the security of its citizens. Internationally, if it wants
47 to foster alliances, a powerful state has to support global norms and values. Nor-
48 matively, we may also argue that, provided it has the capabilities to fulfill these two
49 roles, a state carries the obligation to do so.

50 This paper will explore the two possibilities, the gap thesis and the compatibility
51 scenario, and will shed light on their different facets. Despite the gap that stands
52 between the national interest and global justice, it will make the case the two are,
53 under certain conditions, compatible. We may then wonder if this is a solution to the
54 problems that we face in the realm of global politics.

55 While the ideas of “interest” and “justice” are about as old as the humanities and
56 the social sciences are, the “National interest” and “Global justice” are more recent.
57 The national interest stands as the oldest of the two, and this paper will sketch out
58 what are its most well-known historical and political interpretations. The case of
59 global justice is different. As Charles Beitz underlines, it appears as a new concept
60 and a more novel field of research (Beitz 2005, 12). Despite this historical differ-
61 ence, these two paradigms have been rapidly confronted to each other, in the field of
62 theory as well as in practice.

63 It must be noted that the two concepts of global justice and national interest are
64 western-centric.¹ Of course, knowledge crosses the borders that separate western
65 societies from non-western countries. Moreover, non-western countries are part of

¹ As I will show in the paper, although we can trace the roots of the Realism/Idealism dispute back in
1FL01 Europe and notably in Germany, both frameworks, the National interest and Global justice, as well as
1FL02 their dyadic relation, originate, essentially, in the US (and to a much lesser extent in the UK). They are
1FL03 constitutive parts of the IR academic debate and mirror the history of US foreign policy.
1FL04

66 the leading international organizations and use diplomatic codes that are shared
67 internationally. Indeed, integrating the global scene presupposes to master these
68 codes, and it is a fact that these two notions are part of a debate occurring also in
69 non-western parts of the world. However, whether these ideas have the same mean-
70 ing that prevails in western countries, this, of course, remains to be seen.²

71 The question of meaning is extremely important and complex, as, even within west-
72 ern circles, the national interest and global justice are interpreted in different ways.
73 How could it be otherwise? The national interest and global justice are multifaceted.
74 The national interest is both used an explanatory paradigm and a normative concept,
75 which has, in these two domains, different substantive contents. Global justice is mostly
76 a normative concept, but in some instances, at least minimally, it relies upon empirical
77 observations and social explanations. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that we
78 find numerous interpretations of both ideas and frameworks. Moreover, as a dyad, the
79 question of the relation between the national interest and global justice is subject to dif-
80 ferent interpretations, in the field of International Relations (IR), as well as in norma-
81 tive theory.

82 My analysis is, therefore, multilayered and brings together the social sciences
83 (mostly IR) and normative theory. The relation between the national interest and global
84 justice is, essentially, I argue, an interdisciplinary question and has implications for
85 both IR and normative theory. It is also a crucial issue in the field of international nor-
86 mative theory that brings together these disciplines.

87 I explore, in this paper, the confrontation between different interpretations of the
88 national interest and global justice and I discuss the political, normative and epistemic
89 problems that the question of the relation between the two raises. The paper is divided
90 into two large parts. The first part highlights the gap between the two notions. This
91 radical difference has two facets. This is the most widely shared thesis both in classi-
92 cal IR and normative theory; my paper, first, shows how they stand in contradiction to
93 each other. Second, it is important to discuss the main epistemological divides between
94 the two, and I will argue that the national interest and global justice appear as two non-
95 commensurable and incomparable goods. While it moves beyond the gap thesis, the
96 second part of the paper also includes two sections. In the first section, I show that
97 despite this opposition and the non-commensurability problem, we may find reasons
98 explaining why, from an international theory perspective, the national interest and
99 global justice could be compatible. This space for compatibility lies at the intersection
100 of theory and practice. Finally, in the second section, I ask whether, normatively, the
101 compatibility scenario is a state of world affairs we may want to strive for.

2FL01 ² Whether they can be of any use at all in a non-western context is also a legitimate question.

102 **2 Part 1 Section 1 The National Interest and Global Justice:** 103 **A Contradiction in Terms**

104 This section explores the tensions between the theory of classical realism and global
105 justice claims. Since classical realism has greatly influenced both explanatory IR stud-
106 ies and normative thinking applied to international politics, this preliminary analysis is
107 essential.

108 **1. The Realism/Idealism Debate**

109 The theoretical and practical opposition between the national interest imperatives
110 and global justice is rooted in an old debate, i.e., the historical tension between Real-
111 ism and Idealism.

112 As a school of thought, Realism appears in the interwar period and strongly devel-
113 ops, later, in the aftermath of World War Two. The writings of E. H. Carr and Hans
114 Morgenthau stood both as a call addressed to scholars within the newly created field of
115 international relations as well as to practitioners of international politics. Realists had
116 a mission and the message they conveyed was very clear: International law and ethical
117 claims in international affairs are misleading and have a negative impact on the course
118 of world affairs (Carr 1937; Morgenthau 1948). According to Carr and Morgenthau,
119 de facto, law and ethics are inappropriate tools when explaining international politics.
120 Moreover, they claimed that norms do not play such a significant role in international
121 politics. However, from a normative perspective, classical realists also claimed that,
122 if they were to play a role, this would threaten the stability of international politics
123 and the survival of states.

124 Therefore, classical realism and, more generally, at its origin, the field of IR in
125 political science stood as a reaction against international law. Interestingly, Mor-
126 genthau was originally a lawyer who migrated from Germany and, once he established
127 himself in the US, became one of the founders of this newly created field. During the
128 first decades of the Cold War, he had been of its most influential theorists, if not its
129 most influential thinker.

130 **2. Consequentialism Versus Principled Approach**

131 Morgenthau's thinking is both explanatory and normative. Indeed, he not only
132 wanted to explain how states behave, he also set some political principles that ought
133 to define political action. According to Morgenthau, along with the maximization
134 of power, pursuing the national interest is an imperative (Morgenthau 1951; Beitz
135 1979, 20). A state's national interest lies in securing its security and identity. Pre-
136 serving the state's territorial identity is a primary goal. Keeping its prestige in the
137 international arena is part of the secondary goals of the national interest. Since it
138 was challenged by other states and, as a superpower, was responsible for the survival
139 of the "free world," this duty lied foremost with the US.

140 However, Morgenthau did not totally dismiss the role of international law, as, for
141 him, "there must be certain rules of conduct defined beforehand, whose violation

142 would normally call forth certain sanction” (Morgenthau 1948, 210). Moreover, clas-
143 sical realism, and notably Morgenthau himself, was also influenced by ethical tradi-
144 tions. Realism in Morgenthau’s terms is, indeed, consistent with a Weberian ethics
145 of responsibility. More surprisingly, Morgenthau’s thinking also echoes Aristotelian
146 philosophy and its emphasis on virtues (Lang 2004). Indeed, the statesman must
147 show his resolve and the strength of his will. Among Aristotelian virtues, we find
148 temperance and prudence, and realists often valued prudence. As an example, we can
149 see how Morgenthau criticized the US intervention in Vietnam, which he saw as the
150 expression of a “persistent dilettantism” (Morgenthau 1965).

151 Morgenthau was mainly a pragmatic thinker who emphasized the role of the polit-
152 ical: “the choice is not between moral principles and the national interest, devoid of
153 moral dignity, but between one set of moral principles divorced from political real-
154 ity and another set of moral principles derived from political reality” (Morgenthau
155 1951, 33).³ When costs are high, state leaders do not follow international law.⁴

156 In Realism, security trumps rights. Therefore, realism’s main opponent is a princi-
157 pled approach to ethics. Kantianism or other deontological models would tie the hands
158 of the political and would be an impediment to the pursuit of the national interest, as
159 the former needs to be adaptive.

160 3. The “Is” and the “Ought”

161 Classical realists often refer to Hobbes and notably to the metaphor of the “gladi-
162 ators” Hobbes used when characterizing states’ behavior in the international arena
163 (Hobbes 1963, 144). Whether, it is possible to infer from Hobbes’s state of nature
164 social laws that would apply to international politics, this is questionable; however,
165 the Hobbesian framework is an illustration of realists’ main concern. Realists under-
166 line the essential role of the state in international relations and draw the “ought”
167 from the “is”. Throughout the 20th century, the state has been, indeed, the dominant
168 player on the world stage and, according to realists, it should remain at this place.
169 Therefore, global justice frameworks would threaten this primacy as supranational
170 norms would constrain states’ political strategies.

171 “Balance of power” stands as a better regulatory tool than international norms
172 (whereas according to the liberal internationalist tradition, norms have a stabilizing
173 function). Realists have often been criticized for their idolatry of the state. However,
174 they claim, states are rational and, therefore, because they understand what are their
175 interests, they create a balance of power. In contradistinction, international law and
176 therefore global justice lead to instability. The injunctions of legalism and moralism
177 are dangerous as, *normally*, states pursue their national interests. For those that were
178 tempted to follow moral and legal principles, they would be highly exposed as their
179 competitors would take advantage of such naïveté.

3FL01 ³ On moralism and the political, see also Williams (2005).

4FL01 ⁴ According to Bismarck, states are able to understand the nature of their interests and “no leader will
4FL02 risk the survival of his country to obey international law”.

180 By setting international standards, whether in terms of economic distributive jus-
181 tice or in the field of war, those who support global justice want to limit the pursuit
182 of states' interest because, at another level, this would hurt the well-being of individ-
183 uals. This should come as no surprise, classical realism, and notably Morgenthau's
184 offensive realism, is a source of concern for those ethicists who stand in favor of
185 global justice.

186 Realism appears as all the more problematic that the pursuit of the national inter-
187 est can lead to war. Thucydides' analysis of the Peloponnesian war (Thucydides
188 2000) is a clear illustration of the perils of political decisions rooted in the pursuit
189 of the national interest.⁵ As all states want to pursue their interests, they are tempted
190 to build up their armaments or make new alliances in the face of uncertainty, which
191 could, eventually, trigger preventive wars.

192 Realists are aware of the "security dilemma" problem (Herz 1950; Jervis 1978).
193 Those that favor Realpolitik and those scholars of IR who belong to the realist tradi-
194 tion have both criticized preventive war. According to Bismarck, preventive war is
195 "suicide for fear of death". In the eve of the 2003 US intervention in Iraq, a "coalition
196 for cautious realists" stood against the decision by the Bush administration to
197 use force.⁶ Indeed, realists are all the more aware of this danger, as they well know
198 their own theory could eventually trigger unnecessary wars.

199 Notwithstanding, the emphasis that realists as well as neo-realists put on instru-
200 mental rationality remains the source of many concerns. For realists, preventive wars
201 are anomalies: Rational leaders are expected to understand that engaging into haz-
202 ardous wars is contrary to their nations' interests. But anomalies are part of our daily
203 lives. Morgenthau, himself, expressed his skepticism, as he drew the line between
204 the practice of politics and the ambition of science (Morgenthau 1946, 221): "No
205 formula will give the statesman certainty, no calculation eliminate the risk, no accu-
206 mulation of facts open the future. While his mind yearns for the apparent certainty
207 of science, his actual condition is more akin to the gambler's than to the scientist's".

208 This emphasis on rationality stands in contrast with another factual analysis of
209 the behavior of states. According to realists, the quest for prestige is inherent to
210 state behavior. Although defining precisely what is the nature of state's prestige is
211 a true challenge,⁷ reputation games are said to be inherent to interstate relations. In
212 international politics, the most famous example is deterrence which has a regulatory
213 function, but that can also be very dangerous. Deterrence also reinforces inequality
214 between states.

215 The quest for prestige is a reason that could motivate states to develop nuclear
216 armaments. Prestige and the willingness to pursue the national interest are important
217 variables that explain the policy of Iran to develop its nuclear weapons. Realists such

5FL01 ⁵ According to Thucydides, Athens's policy of building alliances and developing its armament was the
5FL02 "cause" that led to Sparta's attack.

6FL01 ⁶ With the exception of Mearsheimer, most signatories of this declaration were "defensive" realists.

7FL01 ⁷ Collective bodies are different from individuals. On reputation in the field of international politics, see
7FL02 Mercer (2010).

218 as Kenneth Waltz have argued that if it developed nuclear weapons, Iran would pose
219 no threat to international security (Waltz 2012).⁸ This goes against international law
220 and is therefore contrary to the aspirations of global justice. Nationalist bellicose
221 policies also stand in contradiction with the very spirit of global justice.

222 We witness another tension between the national interest and global justice. Both
223 in the field of theory and in the field of practice (*Realpolitik*), realists often refer to
224 the idealist tradition and therefore to global justice, as an irresponsible set of claims.
225 They stigmatize the pretenses of those who are disconnected from the reality of
226 international politics, those pure souls whose hands are not dirty. Worse than this
227 “flight from reality” (Shapiro 2007), idealism is a “fig leaf”. It is said to be danger-
228 ous, naïve or, sometimes, hypocritical.

229 A good reflection of this tension is the clash at the UN Security Council that
230 opposed Samantha Power to the Russian representative over Syria and Russian
231 bombings.⁹ Vitaly Churkin, the Russian representative, mocked Power and her will-
232 ingness to play “Mother Teresa,” whereas according to him, US history was paved
233 with gross violations of the major laws of war. There lies a gap between words
234 and deeds. US policy would then be two-sided. In some instances, its discourse is
235 inspired by liberal internationalism, while, in practice, the US follows what its lead-
236 ers see as its national interest including in cases where human costs are very high.
237 In the face of what is seen as the inherent hypocrisy of idealism and global justice,
238 Realism along with its pursuit of the national interest is unapologetic and praises
239 itself for being consistent with its premises.

240 **3 Part 1 Section 2 Comparability and Commensurability Gaps**

241 The US is a crucial case, as, indeed, its foreign policy includes these two aspects.
242 However, whether empirically, logically and normatively, these two visions can be
243 reconciled remains to be seen. In order to answer this question, we want to explore
244 two issues. Are these two goods comparable?¹⁰ Are they commensurable? Indeed, in
245 order to reconcile the two goods, we often presuppose that they can be compared to
246 each other and, eventually, can be measured according the same standards.

247 We can here draw a parallel with the issue of proportionality in warfare. Accord-
248 ing to its definition in international humanitarian law and its most common inter-
249 pretation in *jus in bello*, the damages caused by the use of force, in this case mostly
250 civilian deaths and the destruction of their properties, must not be excessive in rela-
251 tion to the concrete and immediate military advantage that is anticipated.¹¹ One
252 of the main goals of the rules of war, whether in the just war tradition, in interna-
253 tional law or in international humanitarian law, is to limit the use of force while

8FL01 ⁸ This is consistent with Waltz’s neo-realist explanatory framework. See Sagan and Waltz (1995).

9FL01 ⁹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-14/un-exchange-samantha-power-blasts-russia-assad-over-aleppo/8119236>.

10FL01 ¹⁰ I define here as “goods” the ideas and values, as well as the different sets of practices that the National
10FL02 interest and Global justice inspire or are the reflection of.

11FL01 ¹¹ https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule14.

254 reconciling two values: on the one hand, humanity in the field of ethics and law,
255 on the other hand, efficacy in the military and political fields. The rule of propor-
256 tionality is a remarkable illustration of this attempt. However, both theoretically and
257 practically, the arithmetic of proportionality is very problematic. One of the reasons
258 of this challenge to use properly this norm lies in the difficulty to compare the two
259 opposite types of consequences of military action (military advantage on the one
260 hand, civilian losses on the other) and in the non-commensurability of the variables
261 included in the proportionality calculus (Colonomos 2017b).

262 We are confronted to a similar problem in the case of the national interest and
263 global justice. At least for powerful countries, global justice is often seen as a limit
264 to the pursuit of the national interest.¹² From a consequentialist perspective, states
265 would try to anticipate how global policy would affect their national interest. In
266 order to reconcile the national interest with global justice, they would need to put
267 into the same balance two different types of goods.

268 However, can they? As in the case of proportionality where the variable of the
269 “military advantage” is very difficult to define, setting the proper terms for the rela-
270 tion between the national interest and global justice is problematic because of the
271 lack of precision of at least one of these two terms. Indeed, following the advent of
272 Realism, the national interest has been widely criticized in IR (Rochester 1978) for
273 being a “vague” and “elusive” concept.¹³

274 1. Synchronic and Diachronic Incomparability

275 Are the national interest and global justice comparable to each other? According to
276 Ruth Chang, two goods are incomparable when no positive valuation holds between
277 them (Chang 1997, 4). The *Trichotomy thesis* is often used to define comparability
278 and incomparability: “if one item is neither better or worse than another, and yet
279 the two are not equally good, nothing affirmative can be said about them: they are
280 incomparable” (Chang 1997, 2013).¹⁴

281 Of course, Bismarck would tell that Realpolitik is “better” than international law,
282 because the latter leads to political mistakes. Symmetrically, Friends of the Earth
283 activists would probably argue that nuclear weapons are “worse” than development
284 aid. But, these judgments rely on preferences that are not established in terms of
285 “covering value” (Chang 1997, 5). In the first case, we can merely say that security
286 trumps rights, whereas in the second, justice trumps balance of power.

287 The national interest and global justice are incomparable. This is the case syn-
288 chronically. If, at a given moment, we have the possibility to allocate funds to either

12FL01 ¹² Some states might benefit from resources distributed according to global justice principles. However,
12FL02 even for poor countries, their policies could be affected in other areas such as security or environmental
12FL03 policy.

13FL01 ¹³ According to James Rosenau the national interest relies on elusive criteria and is “plagued by the
13FL02 absence of criteria for cumulating the interests once they have been identified” (Rosenau 1971, 243).

14FL01 ¹⁴ To these criteria “better than,” “worse than” and “equally good”, Chang adds another criteria: It is
14FL02 neither true or false that they stand in a positive value relation (indeterminacy).

289 killer robots or famine relief, we make two different sets of scenarios and, although,
290 we cannot compare the two because of the lack of covering value, we can choose one
291 of them according to our preferences, our priorities and our own definition of what
292 humanity or politics should be. One of the two scenarios might match those criteria,
293 while the other would not (frequently, if one scenario matches our criteria, it is likely
294 that the second won't).

295 Comparability can also be tested diachronically. Can we establish that, over time,
296 state A has elaborated a “better” policy than state B? Both states have had the choice
297 between using realist and idealist policy tools. They tried to combine different sets of
298 measure and, overall, the use of those foreign policy tools has yielded some compa-
299 rable outcomes (in different areas such as security, the economy, the environment).
300 Going back to the example of the US–Russia confrontation, US representatives could,
301 eventually, agree that the pursuit of the national interest (including the willingness
302 to pursue what a priori seemed to be the national interest) has led the US to commit
303 some wrongs (e.g., in the case of Vietnam or the 2003 Iraqi war). However, they could
304 claim that *overall*, the US historical record and its commitment toward the future
305 show that the US is more responsible and committed to justice than Russia, notably
306 in the field of human rights. Moreover, the US could argue that it is worried about
307 its national interest not only because it cares about the social conditions in which its
308 own citizens live, but also because it has a mission to police and save the world.¹⁵ The
309 same can be said about other states such as India, France or Brazil, representatives of
310 each country can find good reasons to claim that, as compared to other states, their
311 national history is “better”.

312 We frequently make intuitive judgments about the behavior of states and set compar-
313 isons. However, this example shows that, since global justice and the national
314 interest are not comparable to each other, measuring the moral and political worthi-
315 ness of states’ policy is difficult. Ultimately, it can be possible to assess the outcome
316 of different foreign policies, using economic or political criteria. However, it is hardly
317 possible to measure the relative weight of global justice concerns and to put them in
318 balance with the imperative of pursuing the national interest.

319 2. Epistemic Non-commensurability

320 If we were to say that global justice policies are better than national interest policies,
321 in order to make this judgment, we would need to choose some common criteria. Of
322 course, those, as Morgenthau, that support the national interest might say that, indeed,
323 a foreign policy based on the pursuit of the national interest (and the maximization of
324 power) is “better” than any other type of political initiative that would be based upon
325 global justice principles, because it is more efficient. Global justice theorists would
326 say that ethics is “better” than the selfish pursuit of the national interest because it
327 is based on equal rights. However, there is no common measure between those two

¹⁵ Grotius, himself, grants special rights to powerful states that have the responsibility to save popula-
15FL01 tions that are unjustly attacked, i.e., the former could lead preventive wars if they are threatened (Grotius
15FL02 1925, 167).
15FL03

328 goods (Chang 2013, 5). This is problematic if we want to reconcile the two, since
329 common measurement would be required to find eventually a proper balance between
330 the two.

331 In order to reconcile the national interest and global justice, we should be able
332 to test the pursuit of the national interest using normative criteria compatible with
333 those of global justice. Vice versa, we would need to test global justice frameworks
334 using the normative criteria that apply in Realism. However, this is hardly done, and,
335 eventually, cannot be done.

336 Epistemically, these two goods are very different. Indeed, the disciplines where
337 they are rooted are also different. On the one hand, the national interest is born at the
338 onset of political science and IR. On the other, global policy pertains to a debate in
339 the field of philosophy and law. Moreover, the national interest is a response to what
340 was seen by Carr and mostly Morgenthau as the inconsistencies of international law
341 and ethics. Realism ambitions to be a positivist approach to the study of international
342 politics, whereas global policy is a normativist analysis of international relations.

343 Their analyses of the “international” starkly stand in contrast with each other. As
344 a concept and a principle in foreign policymaking, the national interest applies at
345 the state level. It also implies that the main actor of international politics is the state,
346 i.e., it is “stato-centric”. On the contrary, global justice goes beyond the stato-centric
347 approach to international politics. Its most contemporary versions are cosmopolitan
348 and individualist (Brooks 2008).

349 The two are divided by another type of commensurability gap. As in the case of
350 proportionality, the values upon which these two are rooted are radically different
351 (Colonomos 2017b). On the one hand, the national interest is inspired by values of
352 efficacy, whereas on the other, global justice is rooted on values of dignity. Moreover,
353 the national interest fails the test of the “separateness of persons”, and this, clearly,
354 appears to be problematic if we want to reconcile the two approaches (Rawls 1999,
355 13). The principle of separateness of persons rules out “justifying institutions on the
356 grounds that the hardships of some are offset by a greater good in the aggregate”.
357 Even if the pursuit of national interest was to yield good results from the perspective
358 of Realism, according to this principle, the stability of states could not justify the
359 burden that some individuals would have to bear.

360 **4 Part 2 Section 1 The Case for Flexibility and Compatibility**

361 Both politically and epistemically, reconciling these two goods appears to be a chal-
362 lenge, if not an impossible task. However, there is a strong pressure to find ways to
363 combine the two. Indeed, policy makers make attempts, they claim, to reconcile the
364 pursuit of national interest with global norms. This, certainly, grants these leaders
365 legitimacy. Indeed, the pursuit of the national interest is all the more “acceptable”
366 in the eyes of civil society members, NGOs or the more general public, if it does
367 not appear to stand against global justice (i.e., it does not hurt justice at the global
368 level). Conversely, civil society activists, NGOs or norms entrepreneurs may want

369 to “convince” state leaders that their proposals are pragmatic.¹⁶ Global justice ideas
370 are all the more likely to be implemented by policy makers if they are not seen as a
371 threat to the pursuit of the national interest.¹⁷ Thus, both sides would have an interest
372 in reconciling the national interest with global justice.

373 From a theoretical perspective, IR and, more generally, the social sciences may
374 shed a different light upon this question. Indeed, despite realists’ attempts to define
375 the national interest and philosophers’ claims about global justice, we lack a unique
376 and consensual definition of what is the national interest and what is global justice.
377 As for the former, this should not come as a surprise. Politics is an art, and there-
378 fore, state leaders ought to be free in setting what national interest they need to pur-
379 sue. Therefore, the national interest is a highly contextual concept. As for the latter,
380 although distributive justice is strong concern for those who study global justice, we
381 find different approaches to justice in the normative literature on the subject whether
382 they are grounded on deontological frameworks or utilitarianism, focus on rights
383 or capabilities... As a consequence, as a dyad, the national interest and global jus-
384 tice include many different possibilities. Hence, precisely because of the plurality of
385 these possible worlds, there might be some room for reconciliation between the two
386 frameworks.

387 1. Contextualism in the Constructivist Approach

388 Constructivism has greatly developed over the last 20 years in IR and has become
389 one of the predominant paradigms in the study of international/global politics. Con-
390 structivism originates in social theory and sociology, and IR adopted it in the early
391 90s, once it was already solidly established in the social sciences. From the perspec-
392 tive of constructivism, we may say, “the national interest” is a “social construction
393 of reality”. Therefore, defining objectively what the national interest is might not be
394 possible. From a constructivist perspective, values and ideas orient the definition of
395 interests. More broadly, this approach is consistent with Max Weber’s own analysis of
396 the relation between interests and values. Indeed, according to Weber, interests rule
397 the world, however, ideas and world visions (therefore values) also impact interests
398 (Weber 1993). Paradoxically, this approach would not stand in contradiction with
399 the realist analysis. Indeed, according to Realism, the national interest is contex-
400 tual, therefore must be coherent with its social environment. Policy makers, mostly
401 Princes and executive leaders, decide what their state’s interest is. This is part of what
402 Morgenthau defines as the art of politics where the statesman acts like a “gambler”
403 (Morgenthau 1946, 221).

404 Moreover, politically, defining one’s interest is a signal that states send to both their
405 own constituency and to other states. According to sociologist Richard Swedberg,
406 interests act as “sign-posts,” i.e., you follow your interest as if you were following a
407 sign-post (Swedberg 2005, 95–96). It does not come as a surprise that discourses on

16FL01 ¹⁶ There is a large literature in IR on transnational actors, norms entrepreneurs and states. Some focus on
16FL02 the question of economic justice (O’Brien et al. 2000). In normative theory, some philosophers have tried
16FL03 to reconcile states’ interests and goals with global justice concerns, for example, in the area of migration
16FL04 studies (Miller 2007).

17FL01 ¹⁷ In the case of chemical weapons, see Price (1997).

408 the national interest are often made public. They are embodied in political programs
409 and doctrines, discussed in the context of elections and are officially announced in
410 diplomatic summits.

411 This approach is also consistent with sociological and psychological accounts of
412 international relations (Jervis 1970). Interests would be both a sign-post and, therefore
413 a signal, in this case, a mode of indicating a route that one's state will follow in order
414 to influence other states and also some domestic actors.

415 From a sociological perspective, global justice is also contextual. Although it is
416 grounded on some universals, human rights, for example, its definition depends upon
417 other variables such as the distribution of wealth and capabilities, culture and domes-
418 tic pressure. It also depends on the prevailing and preexisting moral standards of those
419 institutions, states or non-state actors, that announce publicly to act consistently with
420 this rule.

421 Therefore, national interest and global justice are both markers of identity for states.
422 They are important domestically and internationally. They are also interdependent.
423 Indeed, *usually*, the national interest is defined as a preference for the national vis-à-
424 vis the international or the global. Conversely, global justice is also seen as a gesture
425 that signals the willingness of a state to act in an altruistic mode on the international
426 scene, it signals *disinterest*.

427 This duality parallels another distinction. The tension between the national interest
428 and global justice is also the reflection of the distinction between "hard power" and
429 "soft power". Indeed, at least according to the realist paradigm, the national interest
430 should structure hard power. Conversely, global justice concerns might be part of "soft
431 power". Both liberalism and constructivism would agree on the need for a state to
432 include some provisions of global justice in order to foster a state's reputation on the
433 international scene and to exert its power of attraction at the international level.¹⁸ This
434 is especially true for a superpower. This dual approach is a reflection of US strategy at
435 least during the Cold War and its aftermath.¹⁹ More generally, the US, often, argues
436 that it is able to combine Realism and Idealism.²⁰

437 Therefore, if we adopt a contextualist approach, the national interest and global
438 justice are necessarily intertwined. Both from an explanatory and a normative per-
439 spective, we may argue that the responsibility to pursue a policy that favors economic
440 or political interests at the state level is imbricated with a country's status in the

18FL01 ¹⁸ This would be an explanation of state behavior. Eventually, liberal internationalists and constructivists
18FL02 would make a similar normative argument there: States should include global justice in their soft power
18FL03 policy.

19FL01 ¹⁹ The equilibrium between hard power and soft power is contextual. As opposed to Clinton's presi-
19FL02 dency, the Bush administration focused more on hard power. President Obama tried to restore soft power
19FL03 (and who knows what the actual president's views are concerning soft power). Whether this equilibrium
19FL04 between hard power and soft power and between the national interest and global justice makes sense in a
19FL05 non-Western environment such as China is a question we may ask at this conference.

20FL01 ²⁰ When trying to explain what the Bush doctrine was, Condoleeza Rice wrote that "the old dichotomy
20FL02 between realism and idealism has never applied to the United States" (Rice 2008, 25). In the Obama
20FL03 administration, John Kerry stated that US foreign policy achieves greatness "only when it has combined
20FL04 realism and idealism". See Snyder (2009). The combination of realism and idealism is, for the US, a true
20FL05 "alignment of planets".

441 world, and, therefore, eventually its effort to pursue global justice goals as a form of
442 soft power without compromising its strategic goals defined in terms of hard power.
443 From this contextual perspective, de facto, the national interest and global justice are
444 compatible and “complimentary” to each other and states ought to find the proper bal-
445 ance between the two, depending on their capabilities and ambitions in world politics.

446 2. The Compatibility Thesis: an IR Systemic Perspective

447 Both according to constructivism and realism, the national interest and global justice
448 are contextual and intertwined. According to realism, following the national inter-
449 est is a state priority. However, global justice concerns also need to be addressed.
450 According to constructivism, norms orient the definition of interests. Therefore, the
451 national interest is socially and historically contingent. From this perspective, ideas
452 about global justice might orient the national interest, i.e., state leaders might believe
453 that it is in their interest to limit their hard power and rather use soft power tools to
454 maintain or improve the status of their country in the world. Liberalism would also
455 consider that major powers, in order to maximize their interests, would also need to
456 integrate global justice concerns, indeed ideals, from this perspective, should orient
457 state strategy and its relations with other state units.

458 It is easier for a superpower to pursue this strategy, because it has the capabilities
459 to do so and because power, traditionally, has been defined as the capacity to orient
460 the behavior of other states. However, this is not only derived from the power of the
461 state and its history. The national interest global justice nexus is itself contextual, as
462 this relational mode depends on the international environment.

463 Martin Wight, one of the main theorists of IR in the English tradition, has argued
464 that there are three main IR paradigms (Wight 1991): Realism, Rationalism and
465 Revolutionism (the 3 “Rs”). These are schools of thought in IR theory. They are also
466 policies that political leaders decide to follow. From this perspective, IR paradigms

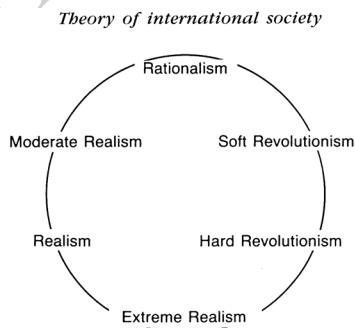


Figure 1 Proximity of the traditions

Martin Wight, “The Three Rs” (Wight 1991, 47)

467 are both theoretical and practice-oriented. Other IR theorists have provided typologies
468 or IR theories (usually IR theory is divided into realism, liberalism and constructiv-
469 ism).²¹ However, Wight's purpose is different, as these paradigms are both theoretical
470 and practical and they are the constitutive elements of a dialectic as it shows in the
471 following graph.

472 Wight, as well as other theorists such as Snyder, argues that state leaders' behavior
473 is the reflection of IR paradigms. As echoes of IR explanatory models, ideas have
474 therefore an impact on normative choices. We may add that those choices are also
475 dependent upon internationally accepted set of norms, i.e., states can adopt a Realpo-
476 litik framework if there is, at least minimally, a shared set of beliefs about the validity
477 of Realism. Such was the case during the Cold War during which both the US and the
478 USSR agreed on "balance of power" as an international regulatory norm (as a shared
479 set of expected behavior).

480 I argue the National interest and Global justice are compatible in some specific his-
481 torical contexts. Depending on favorable windows of opportunity, a balance between
482 the national interest and global justice can be found in the foreign policy of those
483 states that have the capabilities to act according to those two lines and whose values
484 are, at least partially, in accordance with those two world visions. Wight's graph
485 shows that "soft" rationalism is close to "moderate" realism" and that "extreme"
486 rationalism is close to "soft" revolutionism. These are the two areas where national
487 interests and global justice could be compatible. In the context of détente during the
488 Cold War, the US could combine its pursue of the national interest with international
489 justice claims (moderate realism and soft rationalism).²² The move from the inter-
490 national to the global mostly accelerated during the 90s (when extreme rationalism
491 touched soft revolutionism). During the 90s, the US was more able to play on its "soft
492 power". In the context of unilateralism, there was much less consensus about the defi-
493 nition of US national interest than during the Cold War. In the Middle East, for exam-
494 ple, the US tried to use its soft power and establish itself as a peace broker between
495 the Israelis and the Palestinians while trying to advance its strategic interests in the
496 region. The idea of global justice made also significant progress in different areas of
497 world politics such as the environment. This evolution was also heavily supported
498 by strong individualist claims in western democratic societies (Colonomos 2008).

499 **5 Part 2 Section 2 The Harmony of National Interests: An Ideal** 500 **World?**

501 Realists claim that the pursuit of national interest is a universal rule that is profitable
502 to every state and has intrinsically a stabilizing function. States would understand
503 that it is not in their interest to engage in conflict with other units that are more pow-
504 erful. Therefore, the number of conflicts would be reduced. The underlying logic

21FL01 ²¹ See Walt (1998) and Snyder (2009).

22FL01 ²² Indeed, the notion of interest gave rise to international society of states (Kratochwil 1982, 25).

505 is state rationality and cost–benefit analysis. Of course, this theory has been chal-
506 lenged. States cannot necessarily assess and anticipate the costs and the benefits of
507 their decisions. There are epistemic limitations to foreign policy making and to the
508 assessment of the national interest.

509 Moreover, stability ought not to be the sole category upon which our judgment
510 relies when making claims about the nature of foreign policy. Normatively, if every
511 state ought to behave according to the precepts of Realism and if states were able to
512 process accurately the information they needed to predict the consequences of their
513 actions, the world might be stable, yet it would not be just. Indeed, this system pro-
514 motes hegemony and inequality. This reminds us of one of the most famous quotes
515 from the Melian dialogue in *The Peloponnesian War* (Book V): “right, as the world
516 goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can
517 and the weak suffer what they must”.

518 1. Reciprocity

519 A priori, the pursuit of the national interest reinforces hegemony. Yet, would it be pos-
520 sible to take into account some principles of global justice when defining the national
521 interest? Let us imagine a world where the pursuit of the national interest for each
522 country depends upon the national interest of other countries. Every state would share
523 this principle and this belief. It would serve as a well-institutionalized norm prevailing
524 in international organizations to which states delegate a share of their power.

525 Normatively, liberals would argue in favor of this position while claiming that this
526 is a possible world. Constructivists would also claim that this is a plausible construc-
527 tion of reality. Some realists, especially defensive realists or “optimistic” realists
528 would also agree that this is a possible state of affairs for world politics.

529 Normatively, this system would rely upon reciprocity as a meta-norm and would
530 combine consequentialism and virtue ethics. Reciprocity would be the guiding prin-
531 ciple of a world of non-selfish states that, nonetheless, strive for their survival. Thus,
532 temperance would prevail.²³

533 In this environment, the economic and political interests of one country are secured
534 only to the extent where the interests of other nations are also taken into account. Let
535 us take the example of migration and let us imagine two scenarios. In the first one,
536 states integrate migrants who accrue their resources and send money to their country
537 of origin. In turn, migrants participate to the development of their homeland. Eventu-
538 ally, as those countries develop, migration flows will diminish over time. In the second
539 scenario, Western states are reluctant to integrate migrants over security concerns
540 or, else, they claim they are not ready to accept the cultural and historical changes
541 that their presence over time would entail. However, they want to help the countries
542 where those potential migrants come from. Development aid spurs economic growth,
543 and it also augments the soft power of the donor countries. These are two optimistic
544 scenarios, i.e., virtuous circles, in an interdependent world.

²³ My argument relies here upon the compatibility of the explanation of national interest policies from a
23FL.01 rationalist perspective and consequentialism as a normative model.
23FL.02

545 However, given the high degree of interdependence today prevailing in interna-
546 tional politics, assessing one's national interest while taking into account the national
547 interests of all the other countries is very difficult. This would also mean that every
548 state would adjust its policies according to its estimate of the national interests of
549 other countries. As a concept and a framework, the national interest is future-oriented;
550 therefore, each state would have to assess the national interests of their peers, that
551 should, and, in turn, each of them should integrate this prediction into their own cal-
552 culus. This is a true challenge both politically and epistemically. This iteration process
553 stands as one of the strongest limitations of predictions in a highly interdependent
554 international system (Colonomos 2016).

555 Reciprocity should also prevail in the area of justice. Global justice claims in one
556 country should also take into account the definition of global justice in other parts of
557 the world. Through this other iterative process, we should look for a more consen-
558 sual vision of global justice. To some extent, this should be the task of international
559 organizations or other global forums. As for now, the results we have achieved are
560 limited. However, international organizations have at their disposal a great number of
561 indicators (Davis et al. 2012). Yet, there is clearly room for improvement, as these are
562 mostly governance tools and do not encapsulate a universally shared comprehensive
563 global justice vision (i.e., a "global" global justice).

564 Let us take another example. Hostage taking has greatly developed in the last few
565 years, notably in Africa and in the Middle East. This has raised questions about what
566 should be a legitimate and fair response to hostage-takers' claims. States, such as the
567 UK and to some extent the US, opt in favor of a non-negotiation policy and refuse to
568 make any compromise with those who have abducted their citizens. Other states, such
569 as Israel, make important concessions in order to free their citizens, including politi-
570 cal concessions such as the liberation of prisoners. States pay sometimes ransoms or
571 offer other material counterparts, and this has been the case in France, for example,
572 or in other countries of continental Europe.

573 Those who are in favor of the non-concession policy argue that any compromise
574 made to the abductors will accrue the likelihood of kidnapping in the future. It will
575 therefore endanger the security of their country, possibly hurting its national interest.
576 Those who accept to make compromises act in the name of justice and the principle
577 according to which no one should suffer from undue violence (Colonomos 2017a).

578 The national security and national interest arguments fall short, as British or Ameri-
579 can citizens are still fall in the hands of hostage-takers (non-payment did not have
580 any deterrent effect). Moreover, from a global justice perspective, it is unfair that
581 only those hostages whose countries accept to engage in negotiations in order to free
582 them should be saved.

583 In this case, global justice claims should orient state decisions. Human rights
584 claims and cultural traditions where the freeing of a member of one's community is
585 a duty could influence the definition of the national interest.²⁴ States could agree on
586 a mutual interest that would be consistent with some of the rules of global justice and
587 engage in negotiation with hostage-takers. Hostage taking would still be considered a

24FL01 ²⁴ This shift could happen if we expose the invalidity of the utilitarian based non-compromising model.

588 crime, and it should be fought as such. It would be easier to do so while aggregating
589 the resources of those states that stand against this practice and organize a multilateral
590 response to hostage crises and fight those that benefit from this crime.

591 2. A Future “Global” Global Justice?

592 US–China relations are one of the most important issues of world politics today. IR
593 scholars speculate about the possibility of conflict between the two countries, while
594 others claim that cooperation is and will be the prevailing mode of relation between
595 the two countries (Colonomos 2016, 87–92). This, of course, raises anxiety and Sino-
596 American relations are mostly discussed from the perspective of power (Coker 2005;
597 Alison 2017). We may ask a different question. The US has always wanted to combine
598 the pursuit of its national interests and global justice claims. Whether this a universal
599 phenomenon or relative to the current historical moment we live in, this appears as
600 an important step for a powerful state that is becoming a superpower and then wants
601 to maintain that status.²⁵ We may wonder if China will follow its path. Hence, how
602 would the two dyads (US and China national interests, US and China claims about
603 global justice) be part of the same world?

604 During the Cold War, both the US and the USSR were able to influence the defini-
605 tion of the national interest of their allies. In the context of bipolarity, two visions
606 of justice both national and international opposed each other. In the near future, in a
607 further stage of international politics, what would the relation between the US and
608 China be like? Will it be more cooperative?

609 This is a possibility, as, on an ad hoc basis, interests and visions of justice could
610 converge. A specific international environment could favor their co-existence.²⁶ This,
611 of course, could happen in the context of a world state. However, although there are
612 speculations about the possibility of such a world entity, our world has not reached
613 that stage yet (Wendt 2003). This appears as a more plausible claim, as for today, in
614 order for this normative shift to happen, leaders from the two counties would need to
615 be convinced that reciprocity works and that “honesty pays”.²⁷

616 Let us then imagine a reciprocity scenario. Both countries and their allies would
617 understand that it is in their mutual interest to adjust their policies and they would
618 also need to make concessions on their cultural specificities. Indeed, their defini-
619 tion of what is global justice should not hurt the definition of global justice of their
620 counterparts.

621 If this rapprochement were to happen, there would be some substantial benefits.
622 This could ease some security tensions. It could also reinforce international regimes
623 in the field of economics or the environment.

624 However, some other consequences might be expected. The very idea of plural-
625 ism would be affected. Countries would need to significantly adapt their normative

25FL01 ²⁵ See above.

26FL01 ²⁶ See the previous section.

27FL01 ²⁷ Moral and normative revolutions happen. See Appiah (2010).

626 frameworks, and this would seriously impact their culture and values. This could
627 provoke some important domestic tensions and provoke identity crises. This uni-
628 versalism would always be imperiled by the resurgence of populism or nationalism,
629 and this situation would be a fertile ground for these political ideologies to flourish.
630 Paradoxically, idealism would also be affected as this global universalist revolution
631 would need to make concessions in order for a “low level” equilibrium to be found.
632 This could hamper moral imagination and could be an impediment in the develop-
633 ment of new norms.

634 We may wonder if this rapprochement will not lead both to an instable political
635 environment and a cultural impoverishment, and if, in the end, this universalism
636 would be detrimental to the richness of diversity that has been the grounding stone
637 upon which civilization has, socially and culturally, developed. These hypothetical
638 consequences should be taken into account in any debate on the future of global
639 justice.

640 **6 Conclusion: Can We Find the Right Proportion When Reconciling** 641 **the National Interest and Global Justice?**

642 I have explored in this paper the different facets of the national interest global justice
643 nexus. I have highlighted the deep gap that exists between these two sets of ideas
644 and the two frameworks. Indeed, I have analyzed the primary historical, ideological
645 and logical reasons that explain this radical difference between the two. However,
646 the paper has also shown, from another perspective, that, contextually, despite this
647 difference, the national interest and global justice can be compatible, mainly because
648 they are adaptive and because their dyadic relation is historically and politically con-
649 tingent. Then, does the world become a better place when the stars of power and jus-
650 tice align? As I showed in the last section of the paper, the rapprochement between
651 the national interest and global justice, their “reconciliation,” might not necessarily
652 be the solution to the major political and moral problems we face in global politics.
653 We should be, at least, aware that that this reconciliation may also result in some
654 negative consequences.

655 It is important, for us, to understand, in substance, what is a good combination
656 of the national interest and global justice and the right equilibrium that should pre-
657 vail in this dyadic relation. When and in what area(s) one prevails over the other?
658 Which one of the two, the “logic of consequences” or the “logic of appropriateness”
659 prevails and in what context?²⁸ This paper has tried to provide some answers to this
660 question, although this issue deserves much further investigation. Those are ques-
661 tions of great importance when both power and norms are in processes of change.

662 Moreover, if global justice is “costly,” should it be “proportionate” to the costs
663 that its implementation would entail for states willing to make concessions on the

28FL01 ²⁸ These two concepts come from IR constructivist theory.

664 pursuit of what they see as their national interest?²⁹ Finding the right measurement
665 is extremely demanding, precisely because it is difficult to disentangle these two ele-
666 ments.³⁰ This is also extremely difficult because those two goods are non-commen-
667 surable. We would need to redefine both concepts and find a “covering value”.

668 Yet, measuring, within one area of policy making or in a specific international
669 environment, the degree to which one of the two logics is more predominant than
670 the other would make a significant contribution to the debate on world politics. It
671 would precisely facilitate a critical discussion and encourage policy makers, experts
672 and citizens to share their views. Indicators might be used as tools for this measure-
673 ment. Epistemically and politically, this would be a real challenge.

674 Finding the right national interest global justice balance also presupposes that we
675 make assumptions about a state of world affairs to come, i.e., predictions or fore-
676 casts. Both frameworks, the national interest and global justice, are claims about
677 the future. Indeed, in order to capture the national interest as a concept, we need
678 to understand what are the key factors for the survival of the state. Global justice
679 is also oriented toward the future: As a set of norms, it wants to set a path toward a
680 better world. Therefore, any reflection on this dyad should engage into future-ori-
681 ented analysis. The future dimension of the national interest and global justice is one
682 aspect that makes their comparison difficult. Although it has alluded to this problem
683 (both frameworks are undetermined), this paper has not fully taken this challenge.
684 As new powers emerge and introduce change in global politics, the task is all the
685 more pressing.

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²⁹ Those negative consequences such as identity crises and populism mentioned above are also to be considered as costs.

³⁰ We may think about one may seem a simple example, the nuclear regime. A priori, the logic of state interest (“the logic of consequences”) prevails over global justice claims (“the logic of appropriateness”). However, individuals may agree with the balance of nuclear power. Nuclear weapons should be an impediment to war.

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