

The Concept of Parallel Realities in International Relations, A new concept view from US Absolute Resolve Operation in Venezuela

Osiris J. Hamilton¹

Email: internationalist@osirisjhamilton.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1868-8670>

Affiliation: Independent Researcher

Website: <https://osirisjhamilton.com>

Abstract

This perspective advances the concept of *parallel realities* in International Relations to explain how state behavior is frequently interpreted through mutually exclusive analytical lenses, particularly realism and idealism, when in practice both coexist simultaneously. Using United States foreign policy as an illustrative case, the article argues that material interests, moral values, historical identity, and security considerations operate in parallel rather than in contradiction. The tendency of public discourse and media narratives to reduce complex actions to a single explanatory motive obscures the multidimensional nature of international decision-making. Recognizing parallel realities allows for a more accurate understanding of power behavior, legitimacy, and international responsibility, especially in the conduct of hegemonic states.

Introduction

International Relations theory has traditionally framed state behavior through a dichotomy between realism and idealism. States are commonly portrayed as acting either in pursuit of material interests or in defense of moral principles, democratic values, and international norms. This perspective argues that such a binary approach is analytically insufficient and misleading.

In reality, states operate within *parallel realities* in which realist and idealist logics coexist simultaneously. The presence of one does not invalidate the other. Instead, both interact, overlap, and reinforce decision-making processes. This is particularly evident in the behavior of major powers, whose actions are frequently reduced in public discourse to single-motive explanations.

The United States offers a clear case for examining this phenomenon. Its foreign policy actions are often interpreted as exclusively driven by economic interests, especially energy and geopolitical dominance. While such interests are real, this reductionist framing ignores the persistent influence of moral, ideological, and identity-based factors rooted in U.S. history, constitutional design, and national self-perception.

¹ PhD in Projects, professional in International Relations and Political Studies; specialist in National Security and Defense; Master's degree in Strategic Security Studies from the National Defense University in Washington, USA, and Master's degree in Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law, and Operational Law from Nebrija University in Spain. O.J. Hamilton has over 30 years of extensive experience in academia, humanitarian support, and military operations, achieving a unique integration of analysis that bridges theory and practice across diverse topics in politics, international relations, and international humanitarian law.
. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1868-8670> - Contact: hamilton.academico@gmail.com

Theoretical Foundation: The Coexistence of Realism and Idealism

No state operates under a purely realist or purely idealist framework. All states combine both dimensions in varying proportions depending on leadership, political ideology, institutional constraints, and historical context. Political parties may emphasize one approach more strongly than the other, but neither dimension disappears entirely.

In the case of the United States, different administrations reflect different balances. Republican governments are often characterized by a stronger realist orientation, emphasizing national interest, power projection, and strategic advantage. However, they also incorporate a significant idealist component centered on the defense of freedom, democracy, and a particular conception of liberty. These dimensions coexist rather than contradict each other.

The concept of *parallel realities* refers precisely to this dynamic: multiple explanatory realities operating at the same time, each valid within its own logic, without requiring that one be false for the other to be true.

Parallel Realities in Practice: Interpreting U.S. Foreign Action

Public narratives surrounding U.S. foreign interventions often privilege a single explanatory motive. For example, discussions regarding potential or attempted U.S. actions against Venezuela to capture Nicolás Maduro frequently emphasize that the United States is motivated solely by access to oil resources. This interpretation is not incorrect, but it is incomplete.

From a realist perspective, Venezuela represents a strategic energy interest, a regional security concern, and a challenge to U.S. influence in the Western Hemisphere. These considerations are concrete and measurable. However, they exist alongside idealist motivations linked to U.S. opposition to authoritarian regimes, its self-assigned role as a defender of democratic governance, and concerns over regional instability. These realities operate in parallel. The existence of a clear economic interest does not negate the presence of moral, ideological, or security-driven motivations. Likewise, moral discourse does not erase material incentives.

An analogy can be drawn from individual behavior. When a person purchases a vehicle, the decision may be driven both by the desire for social status and by the need for essential transportation. One motivation does not cancel the other. State behavior, like human decision-making, is multidimensional rather than singular.

Realist Foundations of Power and Hegemony

From a realist standpoint, U.S. foreign policy has consistently prioritized geopolitical interests in the Western Hemisphere and beyond. This has been articulated through different strategic frameworks, including the Monroe Doctrine and later the Reagan Doctrine, both of which reflect, attempts successful and unsuccessful, to structure regional and global order in line with U.S. interests.

Energy security, particularly oil, remains a central concern. Political leaders such as Donald Trump have articulated this interest openly in the most realistic approach, without rhetorical ambiguity. As long as the global economy remains dependent on fossil fuels, the

dominant power of the international system will pursue energy access and control as a strategic priority.

Beyond energy, the United States has played a decisive role in shaping international organizational and regulatory frameworks. From humanitarian law to financial governance, many international norms and institutions have been structured in ways that align with U.S. interests. This behavior is not anomalous but characteristic of hegemonic powers seeking to stabilize an international system favorable to their position.

Historically, all major powers have exhibited a predominantly realist orientation. The ancient Egyptians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and later the British Empire all prioritized power, territorial control, and strategic advantage. In modern times, China follows a similar pattern despite its communist ideological framework. The distinction lies not in behavior but in visibility: the dominant power of any given era bears the weight of international scrutiny, as subordinate actors seek to challenge and displace it.

Idealist Foundations, Identity, and Manifest Destiny

Alongside realist behavior, the United States possesses a deeply embedded idealist identity. The puritanical foundations of the thirteen colonies contributed to a moral worldview shaped by ethical responsibility, religious pluralism, and a sense of collective purpose. These values were later institutionalized through the U.S. Constitution, which functions not only as a legal document but as a normative symbol of liberty, rights protection, and limited government.

All of these elements converge recurrently around the concept of **Manifest Destiny**. This idea, understood as a moral and historical mission, has shaped U.S. self-perception as a nation destined to expand, protect, and project its values. While originally territorial, Manifest Destiny evolved into a broader ideological framework justifying leadership, intervention, and global responsibility.

The defense of the American Dream and the Western way of life further reinforces this idealist dimension. Although many foundational innovations emerged in Europe, the United States conceives itself as the principal articulator and integrator of these elements into a unified political, economic, and cultural model. This self-ascribed role underpins its international conduct.

Historically, U.S. actions against dictatorships and authoritarian regimes have often combined economic interests with moral justifications. Cases such as Saddam Hussein, Manuel Noriega, and Fulgencio Batista illustrate this duality. Importantly, there are also cases in which altruistic and moral considerations have played a predominant role, such as U.S. involvement in Serbia. In these instances, economic interests were not absent but were less prominent relative to humanitarian and normative imperatives.

Conclusion: Understanding Parallel Realities as one International Real Dynamic

The concept of parallel realities offers a more accurate framework for understanding international behavior. States, particularly great powers, do not act on the basis of singular motivations. Economic interests, geopolitical strategy, moral values, historical identity, and security concerns coexist and interact simultaneously.

Recognizing parallel realities does not imply moral endorsement or political justification. Rather, it enables scholars and policymakers to move beyond reductionist

explanations and engage with the true complexity of international decision-making. For International Relations theory, this perspective challenges rigid binaries and encourages more nuanced, honest, and comprehensive analyses of power and responsibility in the international system.

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