



IJMRRS

**International Journal for Multidisciplinary
Research, Review and Studies**

Volume 1 - Issue 1

2024

© 2024 International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review and Studies

Submitted By- Kamakshi Rautela

**Topic: Understanding the Geopolitics
of Amazonia from theoretical lens**

Geopolitics of Amazonia

(From theoretical lens)

INTRODUCTION

The Amazon basin is entitled to be the largest rainforest and river basin in the world covering a total area of nine South American countries, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. It is called the world's lungs of biodiversity and faces a host of challenges, from human rights to border security. Consequently, the Amazon has become an epitome of geopolitics because its geography is discussed in a broad way both within states as well as around the world. The fires in the Amazon are multiplying, and they're sending it into a growing environmental crisis. The forest fires on 22 August 2023 once again put a spotlight on the fragility of nature, reminding us that there is still much to be done. These fires have drawn the ire of non American countries, particularly Brazil, which has more than 60% of the Amazon Basin within its territory, for what they consider to be inefficient measures taken by the Amazonian States.

The international prestige that Amazon has, made IR theories places their insights into the geopolitics over the ecologically diverse region of Amazon. O'Neill (2009) argues that it is only if one looks at the time and place of cooperation between states in dealing with environmental issues, whether or not they cooperate, which we can get a clear understanding of the link between IR theory and environmental problems.

From three theoretical perspectives, namely realism, liberalism, and Marxism, this article focuses on emerging issues in the Amazon, which reveal the complexity of the region's relations with domestic and international politics.

AMAZON IN THE MIDST OF POWER COMPETITION

Although classical realists do not speak up much on environmental issues, their arguments can be used to understand the nature of a state and how it deals with its environment. Classical realist, Hans Morgenthau (1948) claims that the nation always defines and acts to secure its national interests in terms of power. This is especially true in relation to Amazon, since it constitutes an essential element of its strategy. It is highly enriched with vital resources, which have been used for the development of agricultural industries. The creation of the Amazonia Legal, Brazil's Legal Amazon, is one of several national priorities of Brazil, which is concerned with the development and settlement of the region (Dagicour, 2020). Not only has this but it played an important role in shaping Brazil's national identity and its development. Neoclassical realism argues that a state's relative power depends on its ability to mobilize resources. This is true when Brazil's populist authoritarian leader, Getulio Vargas brought Amazon within the sovereignty of the state. He launched a Development Plan. In addition, when the material capabilities of a nation define its power, Brazil's political leaders put import substitution into place during the Cold War to maintain territorial integrity and exploitation of Amazon resources for development. Mining and agricultural activity in the Amazon was also supported by a military regime from 1964 to 1985. Private investments have also been allowed into Amazon's gates. This is because of the synergies between "nationalism" and "developmentalism" (Dagicour, 2020). The Kubitschek regime, which had moved the capital to Brasilia, which it claimed was a part of the development of the "interior", had taken further expansionist steps, but the truth was that it wanted to integrate the Amazonian economy with the rest of the state, so that it could not be dominated by foreign powers (Barbosa, 1996)). This reflects how states are "anticipatory" actors as they anticipate danger from each other and since there is anarchy at the top, they depend on self-help. Kubitschek aimed to assert Amazon's absolute territorial sovereignty (Dagicour, 2020). This fear factor is also supported by Barbosa (1996). The territorial sovereignty is so important that Brazil attempted spatial reorganization of Amazon to bring it within the nation-state fold. This urge of Brazil is due to the rise of neoliberalism which allows foreign states and non-state actors to get involved in the internal matters of the state, especially by engaging with indigenous communities (Dagicour, 2020). To establish its territorial

sovereignty over the Amazon, Brazil in its new constitution of 1985, declared that it's the state's responsibility to protect the environment.

Every state, including Brazil, is concerned about security and survival. Kenneth Waltz suggests that states prioritize security, which can be seen in Brazil's efforts to address concerns about the fragility of its Amazon borders. Brazil wants full control over the Amazon region within its territory due to issues such as organized crime, drug trafficking, illegal mining, and migration. Ensuring national security has become a top priority for Brazil (Dagicour, 2020), as evidenced by the passing of a National Defense Strategy in 2008 that emphasizes Brazil's responsibility for the Brazilian Amazon for the benefit of both humanity and the nation.

However, Amazon is a source of insecurity for both Amazonian states and the rest of the world because while on the one hand, Brazil feared that the major foreign powers might try to establish their control over Amazon, the rest of the world, on the other hand, feared that the extensive extraction and exploitation of Amazonia by amazon states will raise the alarm of climate insecurity which will put lives across the world at risks (Farias, 2022). This has created an "Amazon Dilemma" which encompasses threats by 'internationalization' and 'planetarization' (Farias, 2022). The security dilemma in the Amazon region is further explained by Mearsheimer's concept that a strong offense is the best defense. Enéas Carneiro of Brazil argues that to protect against foreign interests, Brazil should be willing to use nuclear weapons in the Amazon. Brazil also relies on satellite technology for defense and sustainable development, but this has caused concerns among other Amazon countries, leading to a security dilemma. (Guevara, 2018-2019). The state's defensive intentions always lead to power competition (Mearsheimer, 2001) as the center right's Congressman Bernardo Cabral said in his speech that in 1817 a memorandum had been made by US Navy Captain Matthew Fawry that reflects America's desire to divide Brazil and to establish a separate "sovereign Amazonian state." Power competition is evident as major powers are concerned about Brazil potentially becoming an "environmental power" (Farias, 2022). Brazil is creating a center to tackle environmental crimes and drug trafficking in the Amazon rainforest. However, Western powers are using Brazil's increased deforestation and invoking the concept of 'responsibility to protect' to challenge its rise and potentially impose economic sanctions. This suggests that the USA wants to maintain its regional hegemony and could lead to military intervention by major powers. (Farias, 2022).

Throughout history, the Amazon has been a source of power competition. In the 19th century, both Britain and the USA sought to access the Amazon through Bolivia and Peru for economic reasons. In the 20th century, a US Navy official argued that the Amazon is a natural extension of the Mississippi River. Additionally, at the 2019 G7 summit, French President Emmanuel Macron proposed discussing the Amazon (Dagicour, 2020), which was met with resistance from Brazil's President Bolsonaro, who saw it as a colonialist mindset and a matter for Amazonian states to address internally. Does this mean that states do not and will not cooperate to conserve the Amazon and remain entangled with their self-interest? Does realism support some sort of cooperation?

It's not true that realists are completely against the idea of cooperation they simply consider 'conflict as norm and cooperation as an exception' (Lott, 1996). Also, neorealism emerged at the time when international environmental agreements were highlighted in the international arena (Lott, 1996) and (Garcia, 2011). According to Lott environmental agreements are always influenced by power distribution in the international system. Anarchy allows states to cooperate on some issues and the self-help system itself doesn't allow states to cooperate on other areas. Mearsheimer has clearly stated that states do cooperate and they utilize both power relationships and institutions. He has asserted that the rules of institutions through which states cooperate reflect states' calculated interests based on the distribution of power. He considers that institutions are created and shaped by powerful states to maintain their status quo (Mearsheimer, 1994). Thus, institutions are "arenas for acting out power relationships." (Lott 1996). Charles Glaser, a defensive realist, affirms that self-help means that the state to ensure its survival looks for opportunities that would ensure its security. Thus, cooperation is also a type of self-help. The uncertainty in the international system allows the states to come together and cooperate (Glaser, 1994-1995). This is what happened in the 1978 Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT) which was developed by Brazil but other Amazon states accepted it. To preserve national security and sovereignty from foreign interference Amazon states follow the League of Brazil (Garcia, 2011). Some scholars even consider that the main aim of ACT was not cooperation but to reaffirm their national sovereignty against the attempts of "internationalization" (Guevara, 2018-2019). The PCN plan was framed for national security interests, and Brazil complemented it with TCA (Garcia, 2011). The Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT) was created to protect the underdeveloped Amazon region and preserve state sovereignty. President Ernesto Geisel

emphasized regionalization as a defense against internationalization, stating that only the countries involved should have exclusive responsibility for its development. Article 4 of the treaty states-

“The parties of this treaty have exclusive rights and sovereignty over the utilization of Amazon resources”

Furthermore, member countries of the treaty have utilized it to develop their own strategic policies. For instance, Brazil has taken measures to protect the Amazon forests and integrate them into its economy, implementing various projects to attract financial incentives. Similarly, other member states have also connected their Amazonian territories with their national economies. Additionally, according to neorealism, states only cooperate when the benefits outweigh the costs. In this situation, Brazil played a leading role as it is geographically and economically well-suited to exploit the basin. Moreover, through this treaty, Amazonian states aimed to counterbalance the growing power of Brazil. It has been observed that when a potential power seeks regional dominance, other powers attempt to balance it. (Mearsheimer, 2001). Brazil's affirmation of the sovereignty of Amazon made many states believe that through the treaty it may serve its interests at the expense of them. Besides Brazil, another major great power in Latin America is Venezuela whose presence is important for other weaker states to balance the power of Brazil in the region. Fifthly, the main objective of the treaty was the rational utilization of resources.

However, the effectiveness of this treaty depends upon the capability of each of the Amazon states as capabilities are distributed (Waltz, 1979), for example, Brazil has much more better resources to implement ACT along with other environmental treaties but countries like Suriname are not as capable.

BEYOND STATE'S LOGIC – FILLING THE GAPS

(COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE APPROACH)

The conceptual division of the territory through "borders" had an incoherent effect, according to Patricia Guzman (quoted in Guevara, 2018–2019). A comprehensive understanding of the causes and effects of human activity should have resulted from the concept of political boundaries, given the limited resource at hand. Guevara (2018-2019) also refutes the neorealist claim that the ACT is founded on state self-interests, given that all Amazonian nations face the same issues, such as poverty, deforestation, illicit activity, etc. Amazon ought to be safeguarded as a regional concern, supported as a global endeavor, and handled as a national issue, according to German Grisales. A separate environmental law that supports justice—or "distributive justice"—was also stressed at the Stockholm conference in 1972. (Farias, 2022)

In this particular context, transnational actors are suggested by Complex Interdependence Theory to have played a pivotal role in initiating and propelling the ACT. This theory offers four arguments that refute the neorealists' interpretation of the ACT and contradict their perspective (Guevara, 2018-2019):

Firstly, while analyzing ACT neorealists failed to validate that the financing of ACT has been drawn by transnational networks. Secondly, neorealist overemphasized the role of Brazil as a hegemon. Thirdly, no evaluation of transnational actors' activities such as MAP. Fourthly, they failed to look from the bottom-up approach. Garcia (2011) argues that one must not forget about the positive incentives associated with the treaties as these incentives through "market-based mechanism" or "market environmental services"- 'debt for nature swap' and carbon trading – attract states to cooperate.

One needs to contemplate that if Brazil used regional cooperation mechanisms to achieve its security objectives then why did other South American countries join ACT? Were the issues of environment and economic growth considered more important than military security by these states (Román, 1998) ? Complex interdependence theory will provide an explanation for this. During the Cold War, Amazonian countries recognized that they couldn't rely solely on military means to protect their borders, and they needed to engage in multilateral cooperation to address their needs. It is noteworthy that most of these states were under authoritarian regimes when the ACT was implemented, indicating their recognition of the importance of sustainable development. Additionally, weaker states utilize asymmetric interdependence as a means of exerting power in certain areas (Nye, 2011). For example, Brazil through TCA and ACTO tried

to express issues about regional security, and economic and environmental integration but the member countries accepted the last one only. According to Cervo the main goal of the pact was to create a permanent system for collaboration between governments and technical sectors in the areas of hydrology, climatology, and technology (Guevara, 2018-2019). In the early years, the pact had limited funds which raised concerns about its financial stability. However, member states believed that the developed countries should provide financial assistance to the developing countries, indicating that the pact relied heavily on international organizations for its operation (Román, 1998). Besides this, international regimes do play an important role (Nye, 2011) as Agenda 21 also promulgates that to promote sustainable development states along with organizations at all levels must cooperate. Complex interdependence considers the role of hegemony differently compared to an imperial power. A hegemonic leader relies on asymmetric cooperation and trades leadership for deference (Keohane, 1984). They can only establish and enforce rules with the consent of other sovereigns. Furthermore, neorealists overlook the significance of the transnational actor known as the MAP initiative, which involves renowned researchers and academicians who contribute to addressing environmental issues and proposing regulatory solutions. The revised MAP III of 2002 focuses on cooperation rather than separation. Neorealism's state-centric approach fails to acknowledge that ACT and its revised version, ACTO, became more effective by supporting the less institutionalized MAP initiative (Guevara, 2018-2019).

CAPITALISM AND THE DESTRUCTION OF AMAZON

Is the cooperation among states and institutionalization of Amazon really of any worth? Are Amazonian states motivated by destruction? These questions are posed by many scholars and non-state actors because the destruction in the tropical forests continues to plunge. The reason for this destruction is better explained by neomarxism which comes up with the ecological approach. It rejects the idea of carbon credits and debt-for-nature swaps by considering them a way of commodifying the tropical lands by TNCs of the north. Marxism stands out by focusing on the relationship between humans and nature. Marxists advocate that every form of relations within a mode of production somewhere links humans with nature since material means are actually "nature modified by social labor" (Linares, 2012). Furthermore, non-capitalist societies differ from capitalist ones in that under former the nature has use value but in the case of the

latter nature has exchange value. Thus, capitalism first 'alienates labor' through estrangement from nature and then destroys nature itself through the practice of "extractivist".

Interestingly, two of Marx's ideas – "differential land rent" and "metabolic rift" (Marx, 1981)- are important in understanding ecological crisis in a social context. These ideas are important to understand the land cover change in the Amazon. For the last few decades, it has been noticed that there is expansion of agri-business in tropical lands evident in the emergence of agro-industrial-agrochemical-merchant capitalist (Dobrovolski, 2012) and (Linera, 2012) and the primary factor responsible for this is intensive international surveillance and investment. The destruction of the Amazon is primarily caused by the expansion of cattle ranching and soybean plantations, which rely on harmful chemicals, argues by Wallace (Dobrovolski, 2012)). This not only harms small farmers and wildlife but also prioritizes the production of commodities for international markets instead of providing food for indigenous people. The government supports this to achieve a budget surplus, and the liberalization of the agriculture market under Lula's government has further accelerated the destruction. Additionally, the construction of roads around the Amazon forests poses a threat to natural habitats. These issues are caused by a metabolic rift, where soil degradation in one area leads to low production, prompting capitalists to expand agriculture elsewhere, and differential land rent, which is based on the varying fertility of lands. As Marx wrote in the nineteenth century: "Cultivation—when it proceeds in natural growth and is not *consciously controlled*...leaves deserts behind it" (Marx, 1975).

According to the Marxist perspective, three powers are responsible for the destruction of Amazon-

- a) Landowners: in Brazil, the landowners want to maintain their status quo as they pressed the demand in the National Congress that it should revise the Forest Act. The revision of this act reduced the area of Amazon under protection (G. Turner et al, 2001). This applies to the case of Bolivia where latifundista elites play an important role in the power structure (Linera, et al, 2013).
- b) State as an institution of capitalism: According to Marxists, the bourgeoisie controls the state, as seen in the governments of Lula, Dilma, and Bolsonaro in Brazil. During Lula and Dilma's terms, conflicts arose between indigenous people, peasants, landowners, and loggers, and the construction of the Belo Monte dam caused suffering in the Amazon. It

is ironic that Norway, a major contributor to the Amazon fund, is also a shareholder in a mining company that pollutes the Para state. Additionally, Bolsonaro's government has faced criticism for increasing deforestation in the Amazon and ignoring climate change. A Brazilian Marxist group, Esquerda Marxista, has labeled his government as "capitalist barbarism" due to relaxed land ownership regulations and diminished indigenous rights (Dobrovolski, 2012), allowing commercial exploitation of protected land, dismantling of environmental agencies, and cutting the environmental budget (Spring and Eisenhammer, 2019 cited in Dobrovolski, 2012).

Amazonian countries, including the United States and China, are unfairly benefiting from their exploitation of resources in poorer countries like Peru and Ecuador. This includes China's use of the Amazon for its oil industry and the US's establishment of a railroad project in the Brazilian Amazon, which violated territorial sovereignty (Picq, 2016). Linera (2012) questions the motives of capitalist states who claim to be concerned about the environment but fail to reduce their own CO2 emissions. He argues that these nations want to preserve the Amazon as a means of offsetting their own destructive practices. He opposes the concept of "shared sovereignty" as it would give foreign entities control over the Amazon.

- c) NGOs and Foreign companies: NGOs unlike in the global north, act as "organizations of other governments" in the global south as they represent the interests of their states. These NGOs of capitalist states are a way of establishing "colonial environmentalism". They started privatizing the community lands of the indigenous peoples. With the coming of capitalism in the Amazon there was the rise of the illegal sale of timber which neo-marxists consider is through 'extra-economic coercion'. The actual threat to Amazon is basically from the international 'imperial-corporate' structure dominating the region of Latin America more than the states of the region themselves (Linera, 2012).

It is quite clear that by destroying nature capitalism generates wealth that is concentrated in the hands of a few private individuals. To overcome environmental destruction or to move for sustainable production, Marxists prefer to establish a society that is based on the 'real' needs of humans as well as that of the environment (Dobrovolski, 2012). Also, the tropical

forest of the Amazon which is rich with resources can generate wealth if managed by the indigenous.

CONCLUSION

From a Eurocentric point of view, Amazon is part of the "otherness" that is hidden in its name, as it is assumed that Amazon is a group of women warriors who left Greek civilization and rebelled against the rules of that civilization. Thus, these female warriors were 'barbaric' and 'untamed'. Eventually, the wild Amazon forest grew out of control and it was necessary for western civilization to tame it. But Picq (2016) argues that it is not 'other' but is interconnected to the global 'core' back then its discovery.

The above-explained challenges and issues revolve around the Amazon and show how important the land of the forests is from the perspective of border security, the environment, natives, foreign nations, and non-state actors. If you are to resolve the problem in a way that is possible only if there is mutual understanding between all theoretical perspectives, and this article does not mention three of them, one cannot rely on any particular theory over another.

This article is a means of encouraging all stakeholders in the system to study IR from an Amazonian perspective. It will help unravel current understanding of Amazon and reduce the gap in environmental policy between northern and southern regions by making it part of an IR scholarship.

References

Anon., n.d. s.l.:s.n.

Anon., n.d. s.l.:s.n.

Barbosa, L. C., 1996. The People of the Forest against International Capitalism: Systemic and Anti-Systemic Forces in the Battle for the Preservation of the Brazilian Amazon Rainforest. *sage journals*, 39(1996), pp. 317-331.

Dagicour, O., 2020. The geopolitics of the Amazon. *Politique étrangère*, Issue 1, pp. 135-146.

Dobrovolski, R., 2012. Marx's Ecology and the Understanding of Land Cover Change. *MONTHLY REVIEW*.

Farias, G. C. a. D. B. L., 2022. AMAZON AND THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER. *Journal of International Affairs*, 75(1), pp. 55-74.

Garcia, B., 2011. *The Amazon from an International Law Perspective*. cambridge: Cambridge university press.

Glaser, C. C., 1994-1995. realists as optimists: cooperation as self-help. *international security*, 19(3), pp. 50-90.

Guevara, G. d. S., 2018-2019. COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO A NEW APPROACH. *e-Journal of international relations* , 9(2), pp. 60-77.

Keohane, R., 1984. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. 1 ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Linera, Á. G., 2012. The Geopolitics of Amazon. *Climate & Capitalism*, Volume 1, pp. 3-35.

Lott, A. D., 1996. *Neorealism and Environmental Cooperation: Towards a Structural Explanation of International Environmental Matters*. Portland: Portland state university Library.

Marx, K. & E. F., 1975. Collected Works. *International Publishers* , Volume 5.

Marx, K., 1981. In: *Capital: Volume III*. London: Penguin Classics.

Mearsheimer, J. J., 1994. *The False Promise of International Institutions*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Mearsheimer, J. J., 2001. *the tragedy of great power politics*. 1 ed. New York: W.W.Norton & Company.

Nye, R. O. K. a. J. S., 2011. *Power and interdependence*. 4 ed. Boston: Pearson .

O'Neill, K., 2009. *The Environment and International Relations*. first ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press .

Picq, M., 2016. Rethinking IR from the Amazon. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*.

Román, M., 1998. *The Implementation of International Regimes: The Case of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty*. 1 ed. Uppsala : Uppsala University, Department of Government.

Waltz, K., 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. 1 ed. Berkley: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

