

Reading Summary Response

Name of Student

Name of Institution

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### **Introduction**

The conceptual basis of international relations and global governance is rooted in various theories. In fact, these theories are vital in explaining the role (or lack thereof) of key aspects of global governance such as international law and international as well as regional organizations. Among the earliest and most notable of these theories on global governance is *liberalism* which was developed in the early twentieth century by notable figures such as former U.S. President Woodrow Wilson (Karns & Mingst, 2010). At the center of the liberalist argument is the assertion that “injustice, aggression, and war are...not inevitable, but rather can be eliminated through collective or multilateral action and institutional reform” (Karns & Mingst, 2010, p. 35). The subsequent text of this paper analyzes this liberalist assertion with a view to establishing whether increased cooperation among nations and reforms in international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) have been a deterrent to global injustices, aggression, and war.

### **Analysis of the Liberalist Assertion**

Although liberalism owes its origin in the seventeenth-century’s Grotian tradition and the eighteenth-century’s Enlightenment period, it is the subsequent versions of liberalism that are commonly found in most discourses on international relations and global governance. In fact, the liberal assertion that injustices and war can be averted or completely eliminated through increased cooperation among states and non-state actors and the reform of international institutions is more closely associated with the nineteenth-century political and economic liberalism as well as early twentieth-century *Wilsonian idealism* (Karns & Mingst, 2010). The

formation of the League of Nations after World War I was seen as an effective means of preventing injustices and another global conflict. The fact that the League of Nations (an international institution) failed to prevent World War II and its associated ills (like the Holocaust) creates misgivings about the role of international institutions in preventing injustices and global conflicts. Not even the League of Nations' successor, the United Nations Organization (UN), could prevent more recent conflicts and injustices such as the Bosnian conflict and the Rwandan Genocide.

Yet despite these failures by the UN and its forerunner, the League of Nations, there continues to be an increase in regional and international organizations. In fact, every new state has always sought to become a member of the UN and other regional political and economic organizations. The question then is; why do states seek to establish closer political and economic cooperation through the formation of regional and international institutions yet such institutions for the example, the UN, have frequently failed to prevent injustices and conflicts?

A proponent of the realism theory would be quick to assert that nations do not join the UN or any other international institution because of the need to prevent injustices and conflicts in different parts of the world (Karns & Mingst, 2010). Rather, joining the UN and other multilateral institutions is a state's rational way of protecting its interest. However, this answer is insufficient considering that realists trivialize the role of multilateral institutions, international law, and the whole idea of global governance. According to realists, especially those in the rational choice school, states will always use international institutions such as the UN to further their national goals (Karns & Mingst, 2010). The realist's view that state sovereignty and the protection of national interests is what informs a nation's membership in multilateral organizations fails for two reasons. One, nations surrender a part of their sovereignty once they

join the multilateral organizations such as the UN since they agree to be bound by these organizations' charters and international law. Secondly, the surrender of a part of a nation's sovereignty (however small) may effectively mean the foregoing of certain national goals and interests (for example, the expansion of a nation's territory). The answer, therefore, is found in the liberalist's view that human beings, as the primary international actors, and states, as collective international actors, have the ability to improve the moral and material conditions of their existence (Karns & Mingst, 2010). In the same way, international organizations such as the UN (a product of states and human beings), despite their numerous failures at preventing injustices and conflicts, can be reformed to avert such failures in the future.

Constructivists are also supportive of this view. Like liberalists, constructivists believe that closer cooperation among states and non-state actors (within the framework of international organizations) plays an important role in changing understandings regarding issues pertaining to global injustices such as poverty, colonialism, and slavery (Karns & Mingst, 2010). Closer cooperation among states and non-state actors fosters the growth of multilateral coalitions aimed at not only combating, but also preventing these injustices. Therefore, the continued membership of states in multilateral institutions such as the UN is informed by the idea that these organizations fosters collective action for preventing global injustices and war, and that the organizations can redeem themselves from their past failures through reforms.

## References

Karns, M. P., & Mingst, K. A. (Eds.). (2010). *International organizations: The politics and process of global governance* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.