

Neo- Realism in International Relations

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Neo realism is an approach in international relations also known as structural realism. Unlike the classical realism whose concepts is grounded on the 'nature of human beings' to account for politics in the international community, neo realism capitalizes on a more systematic approach.

Neo-Realism states that the characteristic of anarchy is that it is decentralized and has no official central governing authority. In this case, it is comprised of equal sovereign nations that act according to logic of helping and protecting its interests. In perquisite to pursuing other goals, it is assumed the main objective of the nations is to ensure their own survival in the international realm. It is also assumed that its driving force to enhance survival is to maintain and attain power over other states. The lack of trust existing amongst countries requires individual state to always be on guard against relative losses of power to other countries.

Kenneth Waltz

Kenneth Waltz in his 'Theory of International Politics' states the basic idea of this theory. According to him, the main theories of conventional international relations, whether it be system theory or Marxist theory, have never been able to explain international relations through structure.

In Theory of International Politics, Kenneth Waltz modernised IR theory by moving realism away from its unprovable assumptions about human nature. His theoretical contribution was termed 'neorealism' or 'structural realism' because he emphasised the notion of 'structure' in his explanation.

Neo-realism is quite different from classical realism. Classical realism states that international relations are built on the basis of human nature and is influenced by the egos and the emotions of the leaders of the states. Neo- realism, on the other hand, does not give any importance to human nature. It states that international relations are based on anarchy.

According to Waltz there are three key elements of neo-realism

- The ordering principles of the system.
- The character of the units in the system
- The distribution of the capabilities of the units in the system.

He further noted that the main constitutive principle of international affairs is the anarchy and the absence of international authority. The main goal of all states is to increase their power through self-defense and military development. Within our own states we have police forces, militaries, courts and so on. In an emergency, there is an expectation that these institutions will 'do something' in response. Internationally, there is no clear expectation of anyone or anything 'doing something' as there is no established hierarchy. Therefore, states can ultimately only rely on themselves.

In this, Waltz argued that it is possible to form a scientific theory of international relations only with the help of a system-level analysis. System is made of structures and units. The interaction between these units determines the way the states behave with each other. Waltz tries to apply these formal principles of organization of domestic political system in the realm of international system. He argues that unlike the domestic system, there is no central authority in international systems and all units are equal to each other. International systems are thus decentralized and anarchic. Domestic political structures have governmental institutions and offices as their concrete counterparts. International politics however is the 'politics in the absence of government'.

Waltz draws an analogy between the market phenomenon in micro-economic theory and international relations. According to him both systems, i.e. the market and international system, are without any defined orders. Self-help and survival are the governing principles in the market amongst various firms; similarly these principles also define the nature of international politics. States are just like firms in the market who compete with each other for survival.

All states are constrained by existing in an international anarchic system. So, Waltz offered a version of realism that recommended that theorists examine the characteristics of the international system for answers rather than delve into flaws in human nature.