

The logo of the University of Delhi is a circular emblem. It features a central yellow elephant standing on a purple base. Above the elephant, the words "UNIVERSITY OF DELHI" are written in a semi-circle. Below the elephant, the Sanskrit motto "विद्यया ऽमृतमश्नुते" is inscribed. The entire emblem is surrounded by a decorative border.

Paper- Perspective on International Relations

Lesson name- Neo- Realism

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1. Introduction

Neo-Realism is a school of Realist thinking, which is also known as Structural Realism. The neo-realist school began with the writings of Kenneth Waltz. In 1979, Waltz wrote one of the classics of international relations theory; *Theory of International Politics*. Waltz tried to provide a scientific basis to the realist thinking. In the cold war environment Waltz highlighted the value of understanding the systemic constraints upon the behaviour of the actors of international politics. Waltz explained that the bipolar system prevailing during the cold war meant stability in the system and hence relative peace. Stephen Walt is another prominent neo-realist thinker, who modified the balance of power argument of Waltz and developed balance of threat theory. Walt explained that the perceived threat is responsible for the alliance behaviour of states. In the post cold war era the most influential realist thinker is John Mearsheimer. John Mearsheimer countered K.Waltz on some grounds and propounded his own variant of structural realism. He called his variant of realism as offensive realism. Unlike Waltz, Mearsheimer believed that all states want to hegemonize the international system. Today neo-realism is the most dominant theory of international politics. Most of the other new theoretical schools of international relations begin as a response to the argument of neo realist school.

2. Neo- Realism: The Emergence

Hans J. Morgenthau (1904–1980) is credited with developing realism into a coherent theory of international politics in the post world war II period. His main work, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1948) became the cornerstone of realist thinking. By 1950s the realist school of thought led by Morgenthau was the predominant theory of international politics. With the rise of Realism, there also came a barrage of criticisms from different directions.

Value Addition: Know the Scholar

Kenneth Neal Waltz (June 8, 1924 – May 12, 2013) is a famous scholar of International Relations. He was professor at various American Universities. In his writings, Waltz tried to reformulate the tenets of Realist theory. His version of Realism is widely known as structural realism or neo-realism. He is respected as one of the stalwarts of international relations theory. In last four decades the debates on international relations theory largely revolves around the ideas of K. Waltz. Some of his important books are:

Man, the State, and War. Columbia University Press. New York: 1959.

Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics: The American and British Experience. Little,

Brown and Company. New York: 1967.
Theory of International Politics. McGraw Hill. New York: 1979.
The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed. W. W. Norton & Company.
New York: 1995.

By the beginning of 1960s, the influence of scientific thinking in international relations was palpable. There were scholars who were engaged in making the study of international relations more scientific. By the mid-1960s, the majority of American students in international relations were trained in quantitative research, game theory, and other new research techniques of the social sciences

Value addition-know it more

To read more about the notion of realism ,one may go to:
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-intl-relations/#KenWalIntSys>

These scholars severely criticized the classical realism as 'wisdom literature', without any scientific foundations. For example Morgenthau's idea of objective reality based on human nature was understood as highly unscientific. On the other hand by the beginning of 1970s there was a general acknowledgment about the growing importance of non-state actors in international politics. This acknowledgment led to the emergence of pluralism and neo-liberalism in international relations. Keohane and Nye with their idea of Complex interdependence were criticizing classical realism for their over dependence on the centrality of state. Under these conditions, the defense of realism came from Kenneth Waltz. Waltz reformulated the ideas of realism in the light of major criticisms. This led to the beginning of the new stream of realist thinking, known as neo-realism. The term neo-realism and structural realism is used interchangeably. However some scholars claim that the appropriate term to use is structural realism. Because neo-realism signifies that there is major point of departure from the classical realist theory. And structural realist theory is not a break- away faction of classical realism rather a continuation of classical realism. Despite this argument in most of the writings both the terms are used interchangeably.

3. Structural Realism: Kenneth Waltz

"Structural realism aims to set aside those features of international relations that depend on the character of the actors or the nature of their interactions in order to

highlight the constraining impact of the structure of the international system” (Donnelly, 2013;37). So, the international power politics is rooted not in human nature but in the structure of the international system. Some of the important **assumptions of structural realism** are:

1. States are the rational actors in the international system. They always want to maximize benefits and minimize losses.
2. The anarchic structure of the international system is the foremost important determinant of state’s behaviour.
3. In the anarchic international system, there is no central authority to impose the rules of the game.
4. Under these circumstances, states are unaware about others intentions (security dilemma).
5. Survival is the most critical concern as a result of the anarchic structure of the international system.
6. Power is not measured by the outcome, rather it is the combined capabilities of a state.
7. The most important question for stability and peace in international system is balancing power in the system

Value Addition:

Understanding the concept

Anarchy: The word anarchy is derived from the Greek root *anarkhos*, meaning ‘without a ruler’. Generally, the word anarchy is used to refer to a condition, there is no government to keep the peace. However, this term is used with a special significance in International Relations. International politics is said to be anarchical because no single state or coalition of states has absolute control over the entire system. Under this condition, the sovereign, autonomous states live in self help environment, because there is no central government.

(Source: International relations: The Key concepts (ed.) Martin Griffiths and Terry O’Collaghan).

K. Waltz argues that the structure of the international system has three defining features-

- A.Organizing principle,
- B.Differentiation of units
- C.Distribution of capabilities.

According to Waltz there are **two types** of organizing principle of political structures; hierarchy and anarchy. Hierarchy is the organizing principle of domestic politics, where units of the political structure stand 'above' or 'below'. So there is a relationship of authority and subordination between different units. On the other hand in international politics, the lack of a central authority means the sovereign units are not hierarchically organized.

Value addition-Did you know

Organizing principle of International politics-Waltz

“Formally, each is the equal of all the others. None is entitled to command; none is required to obey. International systems are decentralized and anarchic” (Waltz, 1979).

Waltz argues that there is no functional differentiation among the units of international system. “ States are alike in all basic functional respects- i.e, in spite of their different cultures or ideologies or Constitution or histories, they all perform the same basic tasks. All states have to collect taxes conduct foreign policy and so on” (Jackson and Sorenson, 2013;80). Now in the anarchic structure of the international system, if there are no functional differentiation between the units,then how the units look different. The reason is provided by the third element of the political structure, i.e distribution of capabilities. If we wish to understand international politics (war, peace, alliances, Balance of power) we need to focus on the distribution of capabilities in the international system. Waltz says that the “ state units of the international system are distinguished primarily by their greater or lesser capabilities for performing similar tasks, the structure of the system changes with changes in the distribution of capabilities across system’s units” (Waltz, 1979;97). For example,if there are two Great powers in the system the structure of the system is bipolar. So the structural realists seek to define the international system according to the number of great powers in the system.

Value Addition: Understanding the concept

Defining the term

Bandwagoning is a term used in International Relations. When a less powerful state aligns with a more powerful, adversarial state, this is called bandwagoning. Clearly, this strategy is adopted by weak states in specific conditions. According to the arguments for bandwagoning, the stronger state can take whatever it wishes to take, hence it is rational for the weaker state to align with the stronger adversary and safeguard its survival. Thucydides' famous dictum that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" captures the essence of bandwagoning. This term was coined **by Quincy Wright in the book A Study of War (1942)** and popularized by Kenneth Waltz in Theory of International Politics (1979).

(Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bandwagoning.>)

In an anarchic structure, war is always a possibility. But at most of the times wars can be avoided by Balance of Power. K. Waltz believes that a bipolar system is more stable to provide peace as it had happened during the cold war times. According to waltz, in an anarchic international system, Bandwagoning could be disastrous.

"in hierarchic political orders, actors tend to jump on the bandwagon, of a leading candidate or a recent victor, because loosing does not place their security in jeopardy. Bandwagoners attempt to increase their gains (or reduce their losses) by siding with the stronger party. In anarchy, however, Bandwagoning courts disaster by strengthening someone who later may turn on you. The power of others especially great powers- is always a threat when there is no government is turn to protection. Balancers attempt to reduce their risk by opposing a stronger or rising power"

(Donnelly, 2013;38).

Value Addition: Do You Know?

Great powers: At any given point of time, the most influential states in the international system are called Great Powers. For example; during cold war times, the United states of America and the Soviet Union had enormous military capability. They were the great powers. However in the post cold war era there is a debate about the number of great powers in the international system.

(Source: International relations: The Key concepts (ed) Martin Griffiths and Terry O'Collaghan).

4. Classical Realism and Structural Realism: the difference

1. In his book theory of International Politics, K. Waltz argues that there are two types of theories. One reductionist and other systemic. The reductionist theories prefer bottom-up explanation. These theories focus on the units of the system (individual or state in international politics) and try to understand and explain the whole. On the other hand the systemic theories provide external explanation as the unit level explanation is insufficient. Hence the systemic theories take into consideration the impact of structure on the behaviour of the units (for example foreign policy). The classical realist theory can be called the reductionist theory and the structural realist theory is systemic theory.

2. The classical Realists like Morgenthau assume that 'statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power'. So power becomes an end in itself for the states to pursue. On the other hand for structural realists, power is a means which provides a "state a place or position in the international system and that shapes the states behavior " (Lamy, L. Steven, 2005; 208).

3. Both the realists and the structural realists agree that there is an environment of anarchy in international politics. However for " realists, anarchy is a condition of the system, and states react to it according to their size, location, domestic politics and leadership qualities. In contrast, neo-realists suggests that anarchy defines the system. So all units experience same constraints presented by anarchy" (Lamy, L.Steven, 2005;209).

The most important difference between classical realism and structural realism lies in the fact that K. Waltz's do not refer to human nature even once in his book. And on the other hand classical realists like Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes and most importantly for Morgenthau human nature is essential to understand politics. In his first principle of political realism Morgenthau clearly says that unchanging human nature is the key to understand politics.

Value addition-for better understanding

Waltz on Human Nature

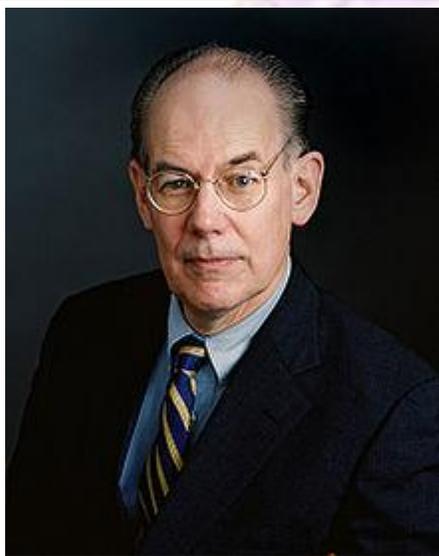
Why Waltz moves away from human nature?

"First, because, in any scientific sense, the content of human nature is unknowable, and second, and more important, it is because, human nature is actually a variable, not a constant. Thus, '[Because] of the difficulty of knowing

such a thing as a pure human nature, because the human nature we do know reflects both man's nature and the influence of his environment, definitions of human nature such as those of Spinoza and Hobbes are arbitrary and can lead to no valid social or political conclusions" (Brown, 2009).

4. John Mearsheimer's offensive Realism:

Value addition-know the theorist



John J. Mearsheimer (born December 1947) is one of the most influential international relations scholars, who is still alive. He works at University of Chicago, United States of America. an American professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. After K. Waltz, he tried to reformulate the realist theory of international relations. His version of structural realism is often called, offensive realism. The Tragedy of Great Power Politics is his seminal work. Mearsheimer is also known for co-authoring, with Stephen Walt, the New York Times Best Seller The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign

Policy (2007).

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Mearsheimer).

John Mearsheimer is another important structural realist. There are some differences between Waltz's structural realism and Mearsheimer's. Waltz's realism is called, **defensive realism** and Mearsheimer's realism is called **offensive realism**. Both of them basically differ in answering the question, how much power is enough for states? For Waltz continuous power maximization may lead to system imbalance. Hence, hegemony is not a goal to be pursued by a great power. Because it will be counterproductive. On the other hand Mearsheimer argues that states should pursue as much power as possible. The state should have overwhelming power to ensure its survival. Here we will briefly discuss Mearsheimer's structural realism.

Mearsheimer begins with the fundamental question; why states compete for power. He provides five assumptions to answer this question in a structural realist way. These five assumptions taken together answers the question. The five assumptions given by Mearsheimer are :

- i) There is an anarchic international environment, and the Great powers are the main actors in this international system.
- ii) Each state has the power to inflict some harm on its neighbour.
- iii) there is no way available to the states to know the intentions of the other states.
- iv) Under the above mentioned condition, survival is the primary goal of every state.
- v) The states are rational actors. It means that every state wants to maximize his chances of survival and minimize the chances against survival. And the state is capable of making strategy to do the same.

Reading the above five assumptions together creates a scenario where the great powers always behave like a revisionist states and intend to gain as much relative power as possible in the self help environment.

Value Addition: Understanding the concept

Power: For structural realists, power is not equated with outcome. Rather power corresponds to material capabilities. Mearsheimer divides state capabilities into latent (economy and population and actual military). Mearsheimer gives overwhelming importance to the military power in the analysis of world politics, because 'it is the ultimate ratio of international politics'.

The next question that Mearsheimer attempts to answer is how much power is enough for states. As mentioned above this is the key question that sets Mearsheimer apart from K.Waltz. Waltz and other **defensive realists** do not support the pursuit of hegemony by any state. Waltz wants states to pursue an 'appropriate amount of power' for survival. There are three basic reasons behind this belief.

1. First, when a major power will try to become a hegemon, all other powers will join together to stop that major power. And at the end that major power will be either destroyed or made more insecure.
2. Second, the defensive realists argue that defense is always a better strategy than offense and a offensive major power will end up fighting a 'a series of losing wars'.
3. Third, the defensive realists say that even if there are chances of conquests, the

costs of the conquest far outweighs the benefits of the conquest. Therefore, being offensive for a major power means inviting a lot of trouble and punished by the system. So for "K. Waltz the anarchic structure of world politics propels states not to maximize their share of world power but rather to be first and foremost concerned with preventing relative losses- in the words of Joseph Grieco, states act as defensive positionalists" (Toft, 2005,).

Offensive realists take an opposite view on this issue. For offensive realists the condition of anarchy pressurizes states to maximize their relative power without those concerns mentioned by the defensive realists. The offensive realists counter the above three arguments of the defensive realists.

1. Firsts, the offensive realists argue that balancing against an aggressor is inefficient and even the states sometimes adopt the strategy of buck-passing instead of joining a balancing coalition

2. Second, about the offence-defence balance, the "historical record shows that sides that initiate war wins more often than not" (Mearsheimer, 830

3. Third, the cost of the war may be recovered from the vanquished territories by various means.

Hence, given these reasons the major powers will ultimately like to be a hegemon. Mearsheimer argues that "the past behaviour of the great powers has been more in accordance with the predictions of the offensive rather than defensive realism. During the first half of the twentieth century, there were two world wars in which three great powers attempted and failed to gain regional hegemony: imperial Germany, imperial Japan and Nazi Germany. The second half of that century was dominated by the cold war, in which the USA and the Soviet Union engaged in an intense security competition that came close to blows in the Cuban Missile Crisis" (Mearsheimer, 2009; 84).

Another **difference between defensive realists and offensive realists** arises from the fact that at many times the great powers behave in contradiction to the structural realist theory. The defensive realist argue that those state behaviours are non-rational behaviours and can be explained by a separate theory of foreign policy. So the defensive realists essentially employ non-structural logic to explain some events of international politics. On the other hand there is no separate theory of foreign policy for offensive realists to explain such behaviours of great powers. Hence the offensive realists accept that states do behave sometimes in certain ways where the theory fails to explain their behaviour.

Value addition- know it better

Hegemon - A hegemon is defined as a state that is so powerful that it dominates all other states in the system. In Mearsheimer's theory this concept is applied both

globally and regionally (Toft, 2005).

The next question that Mearsheimer addresses is **How states get power?** We have already understood that in Mearsheimer's view the global hegemony is the ultimate aim of any great power. However, there are tactical difficulties in achieving global hegemony as the world is far apart and global power projection across the oceans are too difficult. In this scenario, the state aim becomes regional hegemony. Therefore, the focus of Mearsheimer's thinking is regional level. A major power in pursuit of hegemony adopts two types of strategies; one direct set of strategies to gain power and other indirect set of strategies to check other aggressors.

State Strategies

Strategies for gaining power

1. War- principle way, may be efficient but costly.
2. Blackmail- cost efficient but ineffective against greatness
3. Bait and bleed- cost efficient but difficult to bail rivals into conflict.
4. Bloodletting- cost efficient but risk of exposure.

Strategies for checking aggressors

1. Balancing- efficient but costly, formation slow, hampered by costs, action problems
2. Buck-passing- cost efficient but risky if the buck-catcher fails or succeeds too well.

If all the great powers aspires to be a hegemon, then is the great power war inevitable? Mearsheimer argues that " there will always be a struggle between nation-states for power and domination in the international system. There has always been conflict over power. And there is nothing that anyone can do prevent it. This is why the title of one of his books is *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*" (Jackson and Sorenson, 2013;85)

Value addition-know it more

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9eV5gPIPZg>

On this edition of Conversations with History, UC Berkeley's Harry Kreisler talks with renowned political scientist Kenneth N. Waltz, about theory, international politics, and the U.S. role in world affairs. Series: "Conversations with History" [6/2003] [Public Affairs] [Show ID: 7386]

Table: Differences between Waltz and Mearsheimer

Issue areas/ concepts	Waltz	Mearsheimer
Anarchic effect	Benign/weak	Malign/Strong
State rationality	Limited	Complete
Explanatory Focus	International Outcome, great powers	International Outcomes+state behaviour,great powers
Measuring Power	Overall material focus (wealth,population, military etc.)	Military focus (strength/size of armed forces)
Basis of behaviour	Balance of power	Balance of power
Most stable/unstable system	Bipolar/unipolar	Bipolar/multipolar
Most war-prone	Multipolar	Multipolar
Inclusion of geography	None	High (proximity, insular/continental)
Amount of power	Means for security (appropriate amount)	Means and end as power=security (power-maximizing)
General state behaviour	Maintain status quo/ balance of power	Aim for hegemony / "clever" aggression
Classification	Defensive realist	Offensive realist

(Source : Hall,Martin: A study of Structural Realism)

Value addition-read it more

Surf and know

Misreading in IR Theory and Ideology Critique: Morgenthau, Waltz and Neo-Realism

Hartmut Behr and Amelia Heath

Review of International Studies

Vol. 35, No. 2 (Apr., 2009), pp. 327-349

Published by: Cambridge University Press

<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/20542792?sid=21105577319193&uid=2134&uid=4&uid=2&uid=70>

6. Criticism of Structural realism

1) " A realist like Morgenthau would probably criticize Mearsheimer's argument for ignoring the responsibilities of statecraft, and for leaving the impression that states are conflicting power machines that behave without any human involvement as to their management or mismanagement. There are no misadventures, misunderstandings or mistakes in the behaviour of great powers; there is no good or bad judgment, no misunderstanding no miscalculation etc. There is only power conflict, war, hegemony subjugation and so on. That same criticism of a mechanistic model could of course also be directed against Waltz's defensive theory" (Jackson and Sorenson, 2013;85).

2) Security dilemma is one of the central concepts of structural realist theory. Snyder argues that Mearsheimer's offensive realism removes the security dilemma between states. Security dilemma means that the states are uncertain about others intentions. However, offensive realism posits all states as revisionist states. So in that condition all great powers are clearly aggressive and actually engaged in security competition. Here the angle of perception is gone, which is central to security dilemma.

3) Many non realist critics argue that Mearsheimer fails to explain the peaceful changes and great power cooperation. In recent times Mearsheimer's theory fails to explain the pooling of sovereignty by the European states.

4) K. Waltz (1979) believed that the bipolar system between USA and USSR was stable and likely to persist. However the sudden demise of USSR and the consequent change in the international system was not fathomed by the structural realist theory. Many critics argue that the structural realism failed to understand the weaknesses of the bipolar system and could not adequately explain the changes in the international system.

5) Some of the most interesting criticisms of the neo realists come from neo liberal school. Interestingly, the neo liberal school accepts many assumptions like anarchic structure of the international system, states are rational actors) of the neo realists. However the neo-liberals reach a different conclusion than the neo realists. Robert Keohane argue that even in anarchic environment the international institution and economic cooperation can 'widen the perception' of states about their self interest. Keohane and Nye has tried to show this by their theory of complex interdependence.

6) "Critical theorists, such as Robert W. Cox, also focus on the alleged inability of neo-realism to deal with change. In their view, neo-realist take a particular, historically determined state-based structure of international relations and assumed it to be universally valid. In contrast, critical theorists believe that by analyzing the interplay of ideas, material factors and social forces, one can

understand how this structure has come about, and how it may eventually change”.

7) So according to the critical theorists the neo- realists does not take into account the historical processes in which identities and interests are shaped.

8) Constructivists criticize the neo-realist assumption of anarchy. They argue that anarchy is not given out there, and self help is not a logical outcome from anarchy. Alexander Wendt says that 'self help and power politics are institutions, and not essential features of anarchy. Anarchy is what states make of it'.

9) "Neo-realism is faulted for having presumably reduced politics to those dimensions that are conducive to interpretation by reference to rational behaviour under various structural constraints. Because of its focus on structure, neo-realism is said to have ignored the social basis and social limits of power. It is said the power cannot be reduced to capabilities; instead power consists also of psychological factors such as public morale and political leadership as well as situational factors and the extent to which power is exercised within a consensual, as contrasted with the conflictual framework" (Dougherty,1996).

10) Feminist critic of mainstream international relations theory see a bias in international relations theory. The search for objectivity in theories is generally associated with masculinity. Analytical feminists argue that the neo-realists aversion of domestic explanations can be seen as an example of this bias.

GLOSSARY:

Neo-Realism : Neo- Realism is a school of Realist thinking, which is also known as Structural Realism. The neo-realist school began with the writings of Kenneth Waltz. Neo-Realism explains intentional politics with reference to constraining impact of the structure of the international system.

Rational actors: Rational actors are those who try to maximize benefits and minimize losses.

Anarchy: In international politics there is no single state or coalition of states has absolute control over the entire system. This condition is known as Anarchy.

.Balance of Power: In international system, when power is distributed in a manner that there is no hegemon. So there is an equilibrium among competing forces in international politics.

Construtivism: A theory of international relations, which highlights the link between identity and interest in international politics.

Pluralism: Pluralism in political science argues that there are various centres of power in politics.

Cold war- After second World War, till 1991 the phase in world politics is known as cold war period. In this period, military tensions prevailed between two superpowers (USA and USSR).

Questions:

1. Essay Type:

1. What are the similarities and difference between classical realism and structural realism?
2. How Waltzian defensive Structural realism is different from Mearsheimer's offensive structural realism.
3. Critically examine the major ideas of structural realism.

2. Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace is a book written by:
 - a) K. Waltz
 - b) Hans.J.Morgenthau
 - c) Joseph Nye
 - d) Henry Kissinger.
2. Who among the following is not a neo-realist thinker:
 - a)John Mearsheimer
 - b) K. Waltz
 - c) E.H.Carr
 - d)Stephen walt
3. The word anarchy in international relations mean:
 - a)no single state or coalition of states has absolute control over the entire system and therefore there is no central government.
 - b) A condition of chaos and lawlessness
 - c) Victory of a dictator
 - d) None of the above
4. Who is a hegemon in international system:
 - A) A hegemon is defined as a state that is so powerful that it dominates all other states in the system.
 - B) Hegemon is the president of the United States of America

- C) Hegemon means fighting continuous wars.
- D) None of the above.

5. According to K. Waltz there can be two types of theories:

- A) Reductionist or systemic theories
- B) Deductive and inductive theories
- C) Analytic and non analytic theories
- D) Realist and neo-realist theories

6. Which assumption is not one of the five assumptions given by Mearsheimer:

- a) Great powers are the main actors in the international system and they operate in an anarchic system.
- b) Each state has the power to inflict some harm on its neighbour.
- c) states can never be certain about the intentions of other states.
- d) The states are irrational actors.

Answers,1-b, 2-c ,3-a, 4-a ,5-a ,16-d.

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<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-intl-relations/#KenWalIntSys.>

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