



BA Hons.

Semester: III

**Paper IX: Theories of International Relations and
World History**

Lesson (b): Realism and Neorealism

Lesson Developer: Dr. Akshay Kumar Singh

School of Law, Justice & Governance

Gautam Buddha University

Realism and Neorealism

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Realism and Neorealism

1. Introduction

Realism with its several variants has been regarded as one of the most influential theories of International Relations (IR). For more than five decades—from the beginning of the Cold War till its end and beyond—realism and neorealism has shaped the most acknowledged view on the issues pertaining to international politics.¹ As a fêted theory of IR, the foundation of realism was laid in the first half of the twentieth century; however, its root may be traced in Thucydides' description of the Peloponnesian War, Kautilya's explanation on statecraft and Sun Tzu's classic work on strategy in the ancient Greece, India and China respectively.² The main architects of realism—or more often referred to as classical realism to differentiate it from its other strands—were E.H. Carr, George Kennan, Reinhold Niebuhr and H.J. Morgenthau, who in the inter-War period and immediately after World War II having poised with new realities of the international relations, unfolded sound theoretical positioning.³ They deprecated Wilsonian idealist enterprise, discrediting their fervour of looking states' affair much with optimism than reality.⁴

Moreover, the most authoritative representative among the variants of realism is neorealism. Within neorealism there are three strands: first is structural realism offered by Kenneth N. Waltz; second strand is offered by Joseph Grieco, who, striking the balance between Waltz' notion of realism with classical notion represented by Morgenthau and others, puts forward modern realism known as rational choice realism; and third is offensive and defensive realism. Besides, neo-classical realism—the name given to the recent variant of realism by Gideon Rose—is also gaining ground.⁵ In essence, in the changing dynamics of international relations, the contemporary realism agrees on the point that international politics is essentially a struggle for power but it does not approve the classical realist assumption that this is a result of innate human nature.⁶ For instance, neorealism attributes security competitions and inter-state conflict to the lack of an overarching authority above state and the distribution of power in the international system.⁷

2. Realism: Historical Genealogy

2.1 Realism in Ancient Period

The fundamental ideas of realist theory are dated back to more than two thousand years in three eminent philosophers' works of three great civilisations. Thucydides (*The Peloponnesian War*) from Ancient Greek, Sun Tzu (*The Art of War*) from Ancient China and Kautilya or Chanakya (*Arthashastra*) from Ancient India, who presented illuminating case for modern day political realism in their own right. In *The Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides

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shows that "power, if it is unrestrained by moderation and a sense of justice, breeds the uncontrolled desire for more power."⁸ However, this work of Thucydides was neither regarded as "a work of political philosophy nor a sustained theory of international relations but partial account of the armed conflict between Athens and Sparta which took place between 431 and 404 B.C."⁹ Thucydides spelled out the causes of the Peloponnesian War in the well-known "Melian Dialogue." Thucydides' work gave an account for the war and found that it was self-interest (an intrinsic property of human nature) at the core, which compelled the two sides (Athens and Sparta) to fight war.¹⁰ What is evident is that at the core of Melian Dialogue of *the Peloponnesian War*, Athenians accorded the priority of self-interest over morality. This apart, as it is rightly argued:

Considerations of right and wrong have never turned people aside from the opportunities of aggrandizement offered by superior strength....Thucydides, while differentiating between the immediate and primary causes of the Peloponnesian War, does not see its authentic cause in any of the particular events that immediately preceded its occurrence. He instead located the cause of the war in the changing distribution of power between the two blocs of Greek city-states: the Delian League, under the leadership of Athens, and the Peloponnesian League, under the leadership of Sparta. According to him, the growth of Athenian power made the Spartans afraid for their security. Athens at the same time also felt equally compelled to pursue power in order to preserve empire it had acquired.¹¹

Strategy by Two Ancient Greek Rivals: Athens and Sparta



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Source:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peloponnesian_War#mediaviewer/File:Peloponnesian_war_alliances_431_BC.png

Since it is now well established fact that in the Peloponnesian War the legendary Athenian leader, Pericles acted getting swayed by the most fundamental of the human motivations "ambition, fear, and self-interest", yet Thucydides own description in shape of Melian Dialogue considered the question of morality amidst "might is right" can be regarded as amenable to what present days realists offer while setting out relationship between self-interest, power etc.¹² The Melian Dialogue portrays the event of Athens' invasion of the island of Melos. Athens on account of its overwhelming military superiority was convinced that it could squeeze Melos therefore asked them to surrender unconditionally. It is argued that Athenians were not convinced to settle with less than surrender and from the outset asked them not to appeal to justice, but to think only about their survival.¹³

On the other, the Melians under the choice of either annihilation or subjection casted off the language of power instead chose to appeal to justice. They believed in god, hoping him to rescue them for their just cause and compensate for their weakness.¹⁴ This makes evident that the Melians were forced to submit to the realist iron law that the strong do what they have power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.¹⁵ This famous dialogue laid the foundation for sparking debate between the idealism and realism, often found in present day debate of IR.

2.2 Machiavelli and *Realpolitik*

Reflections of modern day realism can also be seen in Machiavelli's *The Prince*. *Machiavellianism* following Machiavelli reflects "a radical type of political realism" that is applied to both domestic and international affairs. It is a doctrine which refutes the relevance of morality in politics, and claims that all means (moral and immoral) are justified to attain certain political ends.¹⁶ In *The Prince*, Machiavelli stressed on the fact that the ruler should give priority to increase more and more power and while doing that moral and ethical considerations should not be allowed to come its way. To Machiavelli, principles are secondary to states policies; the essential adroitness of the statesmen is to accept, and adapt to, the changing power-political configuration in the region.

Moreover, Machiavelli in his *Prince* portrays human nature negatively. In Chapter XVII, Machiavelli depicts pessimistic view of men. To him, "Men are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain" and "they are rotten."¹⁷ However,

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contrary to the common belief, Machiavelli does not talk about the private sphere; he even does not suggest men to be deceitful or hypocritical for his own personal gain. Instead, he described the way a man must take steps to be an effective leader. This reflects an aspect of relationship between a man and the state and "raison d'état", reason of state, the idea that the rulers have to deal with varied situations and acting accordingly is the essential prerequisite. In so doing Machiavelli argued about what a man must do to gain and maintain political power. For him, actions may be justified in extreme political situations for the preservation of the state.¹⁸

Machiavelli's proposition consisted of the pragmatic, definitely concerning what is both "reasonable and effective for a leader to enforce during his political rule." It is argued that: "Machiavelli as simply a "realist" or a "pragmatist" advocating the suspension of commonplace ethics in matters of politics. Moral values have no place in the sorts of decisions that political leaders must make, and it is a category error of the gravest sort to think otherwise."¹⁹

Thus, in straight opposition to an idealistic theory of politics, Machiavelli argues that the true concern of the political ruler (prince) is the acquisition and maintenance of power. In this sense, Machiavelli presents an acerbic criticism of the concept of authority by arguing that "the notion of legitimate rights of ruler adds nothing to the actual possession of power." *The Prince* maintains the self-conscious political realism to preserve and maintain political office. This fostered in the latter period *realpolitik* in the affairs of domestic and international politics.²⁰

2.3 Hobbesian Realism

Hobbes in his work *Leviathan* portrayed "human beings as extremely individualistic rather than moral or social." For Hobbes, all man-kind is in a perpetual and restless desire of power that ceaseth only in death.²¹ Hobbes believed that human beings naturally desire the power to live well and that they will never be satisfied with the power they have without acquiring more power.

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Frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan



Source:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviathan_%28book%29#mediaviewer/File:Leviathan_by_Thomas_Hobbes.jpg

that Assuming only men are naturally equal, that they are driven by competition, diffidence, and glory, and that they interact in the absence of government, Hobbes draws the famous conclusion that the natural condition of man is a state of war.²² Hobbes began with natural equality, which he demonstrated in typically realist fashion: Even the weakest has strength to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others. If some were much more powerful than others, social order might be forcibly imposed.²³ Such ideas proved to be foundational stone for modern day's realist notion which seeks to ascertain the pivot of power politics in human nature.

2.4 Realism in the Twentieth Century

As stated above, realism came into being in International Relations' theory during inter-War period (1919-1939). However, it flourished as a central theoretical premise of IR in post-World War II period. Realism matured in response to the idealist perspective that was popular one in the period following the first great war of the twentieth century. The idealists of the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century espoused the objective of creating peace keeping in view the fact that the world could not afford another world war like the World War I and therefore all possible attempt to avoid such condition lies in cooperation rather than confrontation. Idealists, instead of focusing on the unavoidability of conflict between states and peoples, drew emphasis on the common interests that could unite

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humanity, and attempted to appeal to rationality and morality. For them, war did not originate in an egoistic human nature, but rather in imperfect social conditions and political arrangements, which, they thought, could be improved.²⁴ Such premise attracted strong reaction from scholars such as Reinhold Niebuhr and E. H. Carr in 1930s. Generally speaking, dissention against idealist school of thought revived realism in the discipline of IR. Realism was profoundly augmented in the works of classical realists such as Shuman (1933), Nicolson (1939), Niebuhr (1940), Schwarzenberger (1941), Wight (1946), Morgenthau (1948), Kennan (1951), and Butterfield (1953).²⁵

Then, during 1960s, classical realism underwent a serious scrutiny in the hands of a host of scholars who wanted to "introduce a more scientific approach to the study of international politics." In the succeeding era it yielded to another trend in IR theory which came to be known as neorealism or structural realism. The most prominent expounder of the trend was Kenneth Neal Waltz. When the Cold War international politics was on wane, it further got evolved into neo-classical realism. In spite of successful adaptation of realism into many offshoots over the last few decades, it comes across serious challenge of proving its relevance in the post-Cold War's fast changing globalised world. Addressing to the central question, however, in the twentieth century, it was Morgenthau who refined classical realist proposition in a sustained fashion. Before him it was E.H. Carr who in his book *The Twenty Years' Crisis* took realist position while attacking idealists of his time in a more vociferous way. Carr challenged idealism by posing question against its claim to "moral universalism" and its "idea of the harmony of interests." Carr's position was that morality can only be relative, not universal, and states that the doctrine of the harmony of interests is invoked by privileged groups to justify and maintain their dominant position.²⁶ According to Carr, "the world is torn apart by the particular interests of different sets of individuals and groups, which is reflected in the conflict of interests. In such a conflictual environment, order is based on power, not on morality."²⁷ Power morality dichotomy later was illustrated by Morgenthau in an exemplary way.

Edward Hallett care



Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/8/89/Eh_carr.jpg

Institute of Lifelong Learning, University of Delhi

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Hans J. Morgenthau established realism into a comprehensive International Relations theory in his most celebrated work ***Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*** (1948). He held that self-interest and desires for power were two crucial factors which determined the existence of human being. For Morgenthau, “the insatiable human lust for power—timeless and universal—is the main cause of conflict.” Morgenthau held in his pioneering book *Politics among N*

ations as: “International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power.”²⁸ Morgenthau in the second edition of his book added six principles of realism which are considered to be as main pillars of the theory of realism. His intellectual insights helped develop classical realism into a comprehensive theory of IR and also as a guide to the states to act in an international setting as rational actor in pursuit of their national interests.

3. Realism and Its Variants: Classical Realism

3.1 The Disciplinary Concerns

As stated above explicitly, today’s realism fundamentally derived and enriched by classical realism which grew to this stage due to the contribution of numerous intellectuals ranging from Thucydides to Morgenthau. Realism evolved in stages in a series of works produced in distinctive style or traditions of analysis. “Realism”, as Jack Donnelly holds, “is not a theory defined by an explicit set of assumptions and propositions. Rather, it is a general orientation, a philosophical disposition, a set of normative emphases which shape theory, an attitude of mind with a quite distinctive and recognisable flavour, a loose framework, and a big tent, with a room for a number of theories.”²⁹

3.1.1 Hans J. Morgenthau’s Six Principles of Classical Realism

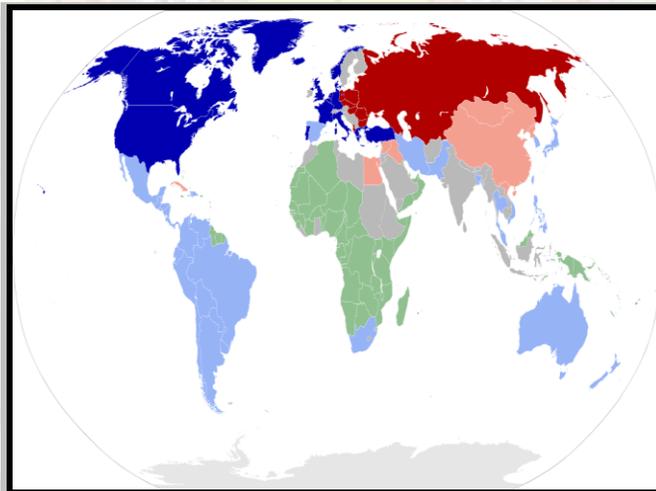
The most authoritative exposition of classical realism is considered to be given by Morgenthau. Morgenthau explained realism in terms of six principles. These are as follows:

- First, politics is governed by the objective laws that have their roots in human nature. Human beings have innate lust of power. This principle is called objective laws of human nature.³⁰
- Secondly, national interests are the motivating force of a state’s activity in the sphere of international politics. The state meets these interests with the help of power. That is why every nation wants to acquire more and more power. In this way international politics is a struggle for power. It does not bother about what is desirable or immoral.³¹

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- Thirdly, national interests are dynamic. These are changed and shaped by the circumstances. Not only interests but power positions of most countries also vary with time.³²
- Fourthly, universal moral principles are not applicable to the actions of states. Prudence is the supreme virtue in politics; and political ethics judges action ultimately by its political consequences.³³
- Fifthly, political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the nation.³⁴
- Finally, realist ponders over the autonomy of political sphere. Morgenthau says that a political realist thinks in terms of interests defined as a power, as an economist thinks in terms of utility.³⁵

Area of Influence of Two Superpowers (the US and the USSR) in 1959



Source: **Source:**

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polarity_%28international_relations%29#mediaviewer/File:Cold_War_Map_1959.svg

The First World: NATO members (dark blue) and their Western Allies (light blue).

■ The Second World: Warsaw Pact members (red) and their allies (pink).

■ The Third World: Neutral States (grey) and Colonies (green).

To understand inherent motives of states to maximise their interests driven by power is at the core of classical realism put forward by Morgenthau. In essence, as maintained rightly by Keohane, realism revolves around three assumptions: The state centric assumption

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(states are the most important actors in world politics), the rationality assumption (world politics can be analysed as if states were unitary rational actors seeking to maximise their expected utility, and the power assumption (states seek power and they calculate their interests in terms of power).³⁶ Besides, realism stresses on the constraints on politics imposed by human nature and the absence of international authority. These collectively make international relations largely a realm of the conflict of power and interest.³⁷

Value addition-surf and know

To know more about realism you may go the given link

[A] Realism: **Web link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnKEFSVAiNQ>

3.1.2 Assumptions of Classical Realism

Classical realism deals with power politics, national interests, conflict among nations, self-help, survival, security, statism and so on and so forth. Essentially, the root of all these are associated with innate human desires towards lust for power. Having elaborated above, however in nut-shell, assumptions of classical realism can be summarized as:

- (i) Even though classical realism deals with politics in the international society, but its basic assumptions begin with human nature. It does discover the roots of international politics in human nature. For realism, the shape of politics at national and international levels is nothing but the reflection of fundamental human nature. Realism considers that human nature is not essentially generous or benign but somewhat "self-centered and competitive". Morgenthau described this in terms of objective laws of human nature.³⁸ It means, politics is governed by the objective laws that have their roots in human nature.
- (ii) Classical realism views state as main actor in international politics. This is notably known as statism. Statism is the term given to the idea of state as the legitimate representation of the collective will of the people. The collective will of the people at international level is mirrored as national interest/s. Realism

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argues that the state is the main player, if not the sole, to accomplish its national interests.³⁹

- (iii) National interests are the motivating force of a state's activity in the sphere of international politics. This means that states in international arena act in accordance with their national interests. National interests are main driving force. A state meets national interests with the help of power. Therefore, according to realist views, if national interests are the end then power is the means. That is why every nation wants to acquire more and more power. In this way, as said above, international politics is a struggle for power.⁴⁰
- (iv) Classical realists are by and large suspicious so far as the importance of morality to international politics is concerned. However, few realists such as Kennan (relative realism) and Morgenthau (transcendental realism) addressed the questions of morality, but by and large realists appear to be careful for not conflating morality in international relations.⁴¹

Value Addition: Defining more terms

National interest: In accordance with realist propositions there are some permanent interests of state and these are attempted to be preserved because state's survival depend on them. National interest is centred on the core values of a particular society; thus, it includes security of territorial integrity, political independence, national welfare, preservation of socio-cultural identity and promoting harmonious relations with other states.

Moral relativism: Realists define that morality is relative to a particular community rather than widely shared across states, societies or cultures.

Security : The term security and national security are understood to be synonymous to each other. But in the academic exercises, it is a matter of perspective. The hard core realists mean security and national security something similar to each other. For them, security means security of the state and its core values, which is national security. However, now a day the term security has become more controversial because debate regarding it has attracted the attention of various other mainstream theories, which present understanding over it in accordance with their own theoretical premises.

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3.2 Critics of Classical Realism

3.2.1 Neorealist Critics

Fundamental assumptions, upon which the foundation of classical realism has been laid down, have attracted serious opposition from within its school. Scholars who produced such dissensions were classified as structural realist or neorealist. However, the voices against classical realism appeared in the late 1970s in a number of alternative thematic classifications which have been offered to differentiate realism into a variety of distinct categories.⁴² Neorealism critiqued classical realism; however, in so doing it sought to reformulate some of basic postulates of classical realism. The most authoritative attempt was of Kenneth Neil Waltz who in his book *Theory of International Politics* (1979) maintained that his new theory was the response to the liberal challenge and attempt to cure the defects of the classical realism of Hans J. Morgenthau with his more scientific approach.⁴³ The theory developed by Waltz denounced classical realism's reductionist interpretation of international politics, which hinges around human nature.

Dissenting against realism, neorealism argues that it is not human nature which dictates, induces or guides state's behaviour in the international arena but it is the absence of any overriding central international authority, which, according to Waltz, is anarchy. This poses constraints upon state's behaviour. Thus, it is anarchical structure of the international system, which dictates states to act in certain ways.⁴⁴

For neorealism, the fundamental interest of each state is security, unlike classical realist for whom power was both "the means and the end." Therefore, securing state's prime values in an anarchical international structure is supreme goal of the state. In a crucial situation, however, the eventual concern of the state is not power but security. That is why Kenneth Waltz argues that state is security maximiser rather than power maximiser.⁴⁵

Security is directly or indirectly related to survival. Survival, for neorealists, is a condition to realize other objectives of the state. The motivating force of survival is the prime factors which conditions states' behaviour in the international setting and consequently compel them to develop military capabilities. That is how states increase their relative power. Intending to enhance relative power also emanate from the fact that no state can read the right future intention of other states'. This primarily becomes reason for security dilemma.⁴⁶

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3.2.2 Liberal Critics

Liberal international theorists denounce classical realists' proposition about power politics characterised by conflict. Instead, they believe in the benign nature of states which help cooperate with each other on the matter of common interests. They hold that it is cooperation rather than conflict which is the fundamental ingredient of international politics.⁴⁷ Besides, the centrality of state in the international politics viewed by classical realists is also challenged by liberals. They hold that state is not the sole actor, non-state actors and international organisations are equally important in international politics. The idea of complex interdependence given by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye downplays the role of high politics which essentially gives primacy of state and state institutions. For liberals, due to increased interdependencies in the international society the role of low politics in which economics, finance and culture are important has started playing predominant role.⁴⁸

3.2.3 Marxist Critics

Marxist critic to basic premises of classical realism can be seen primarily in the classic interpretation of Lenin's theory of international politics. Lenin described that more power accrued by capitalist states in an international arena is emblematic to the exploitation of the weaker states devoid of power. Subsequently world system theorists and dependency theorists extended this to explain how capitalist core (powerful industrialist states) continues to extract power from weaker periphery (developing Third World).⁴⁹ The flow of resources from periphery to core is maintained through power. More military strength contrary to the realist proposition does not signify state's inherent tendency but compulsion of capitalist states. Neo-Marxist critics by critical theorists take into account, instead of the state, the social character as main dynamic of international politics.⁵⁰

3.2.4 Post-Cold War Versions

As the Cold War-international politics started fading away, realism also began to receive quite a few modifications which later on yielded into various other off-shoots. All these have their own way of looking at international politics and for this reason they have been critical to the basic postulates of classical realism. For instance, important versions of realism developed by Randall L. Schweller and Farid Zakaria known as neoclassical realism, and by Joseph M. Grieco and Stephen D. Krasner known as rational choice realism profoundly modified realism in the light of the changing international conditions.⁵¹ Even John J. Mearsheimer expounded offensive realism in his famous work *The Tragedy of Great Power*

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Politics (2001), in which he took deflected path from Waltz's premises and argued that "the anarchical, self-help system" induces states to maximise their "relative power position" in the international system.⁵²

4. Neorealism

4.1 The Disciplinary Concerns

Realism is not a monolithic concept. As appropriately argued by Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "realism is not a single theory but a family of theories—a paradigm."⁵³ Therefore, the belief that there is not one realism, but many, leads logically to a delineation of the different types of realism. In the last few years several alternative thematic classifications have been offered to differentiate realism into a variety of categories.⁵⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz's neorealism is called structural realism is considered to be the important category of realism. Neorealism is an extension of classical realism in a redefined manner. It seeks to reformulate some of the basic postulates of classical realism. As stated earlier, neorealism was propounded by Waltz, who in his book *Theory of International Politics* (1979) drew upon its theoretical premises.

Value addition-know it more

To read more about the different dimensions of realism and neo-realism you may read further from: <http://www.e-ir.info/2010/12/19/realism-and-neorealism-an-investigative-overview/>, Accessed on November 10, 2014.

4.1.1 Basic Postulates of Neorealism/Structural Realism

Neorealism has focused upon the absence of principal international authority which guides the behavior of states in an international setting. According to Waltz, it is anarchy which constraints states' behaviour. This makes structure of the international system anarchical. The anarchical structure compels states to act in certain ways. That is why this theory is also known as structural realism. According to Mearsheimer, the first assumption of structural realism is that great powers are the main actors in world politics and they operate in an anarchic system. This is not to say that the system is characterized by chaos or disorder. Anarchy is an ordering principle; it simply means that there is no centralized authority or ultimate arbiter that stands above states. The opposite of anarchy is hierarchy, which is the ordering principle of domestic politics.⁵⁵

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For neorealism, the primary interest of each state is security, contrary to classical realist's view for which power remains both the means and the end. Therefore, securing state's prime values in an anarchical international structure is supreme goal of a state. In a crucial situation, as stated earlier, the vital concern of the state is transformed from power to security. That is why waltz argues that state is security maximiser rather than power maximiser.⁵⁶

The unit of the international system is state. Neorealism/structural realism recognises the existence of non-state actors, but dismisses them as relatively unimportant. Since all states want to survive, and anarchy presupposes a self-help system in which each state has to take care of itself, there is no division of labour or functional differentiation among them. While functionally similar, they are nonetheless distinguished by their relative capabilities (the power each of them represents) to perform the same function.⁵⁷

Security is directly or indirectly related to survival. The main goal of states is survival. States seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order. They can pursue other goals like prosperity and protecting human rights, but those aims must always take a back seat to survival, because if a state does not survive, it cannot pursue those other goals.⁵⁸ States always intend to increase their relative power. Intending to enhance relative power also emanate from the fact that no state can read the right future intention of other states'. This primarily becomes reason for security dilemma.⁵⁹ Security dilemma is the brain child of John Herz, but scholar like Stephen M. Walt seeks to refashion its crucial arguments with "balance of threat" thesis.⁶⁰

States may have similar needs but they differ in capability to accomplish them. It is argued that the hierarchical ordering of states in terms of abilities determines the distribution of capabilities. The aspiration and relative abilities of each state to maximise relative power gives rise to a system of balance of power, which is administered nationally by enhancing their own capabilities capturing measures of economic development, raising military spending and internationally by entering into alliances to check the power of its adversary.⁶¹

Value addition-know it more

To know different dynamics of neo realism, you may go to the link given:

[B] Neorealism/Structural Realism:

Web link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXIIDh6rD18>

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The main exponent of neorealism, Kenneth Waltz, seems interested in providing a rank-ordering of states as to be able to differentiate and count the numbers of great powers.⁶² It is because position of states in international hierarchy and distribution of power is crucial in the understanding of international politics.

Waltz's schema has appropriately absorbed the essence of his thought in the following way:⁶³

- **Organising principles of politics:** (a) Anarchy: which corresponds to the decentralised reality of international politics; (b) Hierarchy: that is the basis of the domestic order.
- **Functional non distribution of the units:** Units of the international system are functionally similar, that is state.
- **Distribution of capabilities across units:** Position of states in international hierarchy and distribution of power is crucial in the understanding of international politics.

Moreover, neorealism asserted that it was due to bipolarity stability in the international system was maintained which also helped to sustain peace in the world. It is contrary to the classical realist's proposition regarding peace, which argued, was possible via agential power of the state, the diplomacy.⁶⁴ To Mearsheimer, realists who think bipolarity is less war-prone put forward three supporting arguments. First there is more opportunity for great powers to fight each other in multipolarity than bipolarity. There are only two great powers in bipolarity, which means there is only one great power versus great power dyad. Secondly, there tends to be greater equality between the great powers in bipolarity. Thirdly, there is more clarity about potential threats in bipolarity, because there is only one other great power.⁶⁵

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Value Addition: Defining the terms

Anarchical system more often appears in the lexicon of IR and entails 'ordering principle' of international politics, indicating towards absence of overriding central authority to control the state actors in the international system.

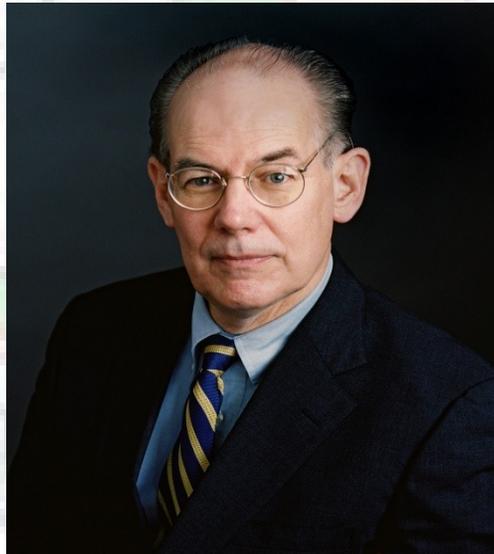
Capability implies for overall ability of a state to get its interest fulfilled. This is in some way interchangeably used as power. A state attains capability through manageable population, size of territory, resources, economic strength, military strength and competence.

Security dilemma was coined by John Herz, which refers to a state of affairs between nation-states, where increase of military power by one state is perceived as directed against other leading to beef-up its security resulting into a security spiraling and consequently security dilemma.

Kenneth N. Waltz



John J. Mearsheimer



Source: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/pr/00/03/kennethWaltz.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Mearsheimer#mediaviewer/File:John_Mearsheimer.jpg

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4.1.2 Defensive Neorealism

There are also two variants within neorealist school of thought. Apparently, the division between offensive and defensive realism firstly appeared in Jack Snyders' 1991 work.⁶⁶ Defensive neorealism is propounded by Waltz yet developed and enriched later by Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder; and offensive neorealism is mainly developed by John J. Mearsheimer. Apart from Waltz, Jervis and Snyder, defensive neorealism can be seen in specific theories developed by different prominent scholars of international politics. For instance, offense-defense theory developed by Robert Jervis, Stephen Van Evera, Sean Lynn-Jones, and Charles Glaser; balance-of-power theory cherished by Barry Posen and Michael Mastanduno; balance-of-threat theory produced by Stephen M. Walt; domestic mobilisation theories explained by Jack Snyder, Thomas Christensen, and Aron Friedberg; and security dilemma theory though invented by John Herz but refashioned in defensive neorealism's flavor by Thomas Christensen, Robert Ross, and William Rose.

Primarily relied on Waltz's notion of neorealism, defensive neorealism suggests that our assumptions of relations with other state depend on whether they are friends or enemy. It is argued as: "Defensive realism holds that the international system provides incentives for expansion only under certain conditions. Under anarchy, many of the means a state uses to increase its security decrease the security of other states. This security dilemma causes states to worry about one another's future intentions and relative power. Pairs of states may pursue purely security-seeking strategies, but inadvertently generate spirals of mutual hostility or conflict."⁶⁷ Further to it, "defensive realism predicts greater variation in internationally driven expansion and suggests that states ought to generally pursue moderate strategies as the best route to security. Under most circumstances, the stronger states in the international system should pursue military, diplomatic, and foreign economic policies that communicate restraint."⁶⁸ This means clearly defensive realism emphasises on security. Thus, it stresses upon "security maximisation".⁶⁹

As quoted by Steven L. Lamy defensive neo-realists Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder maintain as:

Most leaders understand that the costs of war clearly outweigh the benefits. The use of military force for conquest and expansion is a security strategy that most leaders reject in this age of complex interdependence and globalisation. War remains a tool of statecraft for some; however, most wars by citizens and leaders alike to be caused by irrational or dysfunctional forces within a society, such as excessive militarism and ethno-nationalism.⁷⁰

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4.1.3 Offensive Neorealism

The main representative of offensive neorealism is considered to be John Mearsheimer. Offensive realism although inspired by both neorealism and classical realism, but in order to depart fundamentally from their essential premises, it gives analytical primacy to "the hostile and intolerant nature of the international system as the cause of conflict." Drawing focus on the work of Mearsheimer, Dunne and Schmidt held as: The structure of the international system compels states to maximize their relative power position. Under anarchy, self-help is the basic principle of action. Yet not only do all states possess some offensive military capability, but there is a great deal of uncertainty about the intentions of other states.⁷¹ Consequently, what Mearsheimer observes that "there are no satisfied or status quo states; rather all states are continuously searching for opportunities to gain power at the expense of other states. Contrary to Waltz, Mearsheimer argues that states recognize that the best path to peace is to accumulate more power than anyone else."⁷² Therefore, for offensive realism, states are "power maximiser" than "security maximiser".

For an analyst, "all states attempt to maximise their relative power because only the strongest states can guarantee their survival. They follow expansionist policies when and where the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs."⁷³ Stephen L. Lamy writes that according to Mearsheimer, leaders of countries should pursue security policies that weaken their potential enemy and increase their power relative to all others. Therefore, to offensive neo-realists, international relations is a prisoner's dilemma game.⁷⁴ However, Lamy further argued as:

In the era of globalisation, the incompatibility of state's goals and interests enhances the competitive nature of an anarchic system and makes conflict as inevitable as cooperation. Thus, attempt to reducing military budgets at the end of the Cold War by major powers was that by reducing military budget indirectly instability in the international order is invited considered by offensive neo-realist to be harmful. Scholars of this school argue.⁷⁵

4.1.4 Difference between Defensive and Offensive Neorealism

Both defensive and offensive neorealisms are considered to be the important off-shoots of neorealism. However, the two differ with each other on many counts: (a) Defensive neorealist is considered to be more optimistic than offensive neorealist. (b) States' actions in the international system by defensive neorealists are viewed as security maximiser, while by offensive neorealist as power maximiser. (c) Defensive neorealism sees conflict unnecessary only in a subset of situations, for instance in economic relations; while, offensive neorealism does not appear to give such considerations. (d) Defensive realists

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raise skepticism on offensive realists argument on whether leaders can be certain on an aggressive move by state is an expansionary action intended to challenge the existing order or simply a preventive policy aimed at protecting their security.⁷⁶

4.2 Critics of Neorealism

In recent years the fundamental postulates of neorealism has attracted profound criticism. First and foremost is its failure to predict changes in the international system. This happened with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar international system. If neo-realists claim their theory a scientific one, as Waltz himself does in his book *Theory of International Politics* that his structural realism is a positivist theory and the basic assumption is that the objective of positivist theory is to predict, then why neorealism could not predict the end of the Cold War.⁷⁷

Secondly, the question is posed against to what extent anarchic structure can influence the state behaviour in the international politics. For neoliberal institutionalists, it is international institutions and the urge of interdependence which dictate actions of states. According to Keohane, states can widen the perception of their self-interest through economic cooperation and involvement in international institutions.⁷⁸

Thirdly, neorealism's premise that long lasting peace can only be possible in bipolar system is contradicted by democratic peace theorist. Their arguments are based on the fact that it is democracy which can prevent war. Historically, no democracies fought wars.⁷⁹

Value Addition:

Web links to allow you to probe more about your inquisitiveness

Interview

[A] Conversation with John Mearsheimer

Web link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKFamUu6dGw>

Fourth objection against neorealism is derived from the fact that it fails to explain intervening variables in domestic politics. The notion such as grand strategy attempts to discover the deficiencies of the core assumptions of neorealism by raising concerns of intervening variables in domestic politics rather than exclusively hinging upon external constraints while determining states action in international arena. Infact, grand strategy as

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an analytical concept is “considered set of national policies in peace and war that both set out the goals of the state in international politics and prescribe how a broad range of national resources should be utilised in pursuit of those goals.” Therefore, “grand strategy is therefore the study of states’ attitudes to the international environment—of how they mobilise which elements of their power in pursuit of which causes in global politics.”⁸⁰

Fifthly, critical theorists, constructivists, postmodernists and feminists raise voices against neorealism in their own ways. An alternative and different critique of realism is offered by emancipatory theory propounded chiefly by Ken Booth. Their critique is based on their project on global human emancipation. Realist game of power politics and military strategy is now obsolete because security is now a local problem within disorganized and sometimes failed state. It is no longer primarily a problem of national security. Security is now more than ever cosmopolitan and local at the same time. What they want that there is need to transform the international system from power struggle to human emancipation. Here realists’ proposition falls short of the global expectation.⁸¹

Constructivists hold that anarchy (an organizing principle given by neorealism) is what states make of it. Power and interests are constituted by ideas and norms. Citing Wendt, Korab-Karpowicz states that neorealism cannot account for change in world politics, but his norm-based constructivism can.⁸² While postmodernism thrusts aside the state’s claim to be a legitimate focus of human loyalties and its right to impose social and political boundaries. It supports cultural diversity and stresses upon the interests of minorities. Feminism argues that the realist theory exhibits a masculine bias and advocates the inclusion of woman and alternative values into public life.⁸³

And, finally, the powerful current of globalisation has affected the neorealism’s idea of statism. This has given rise to new actors in the international system. They are effectively taking away state’s prime role and also in many cases undermining states ability to exert power and ensure security.

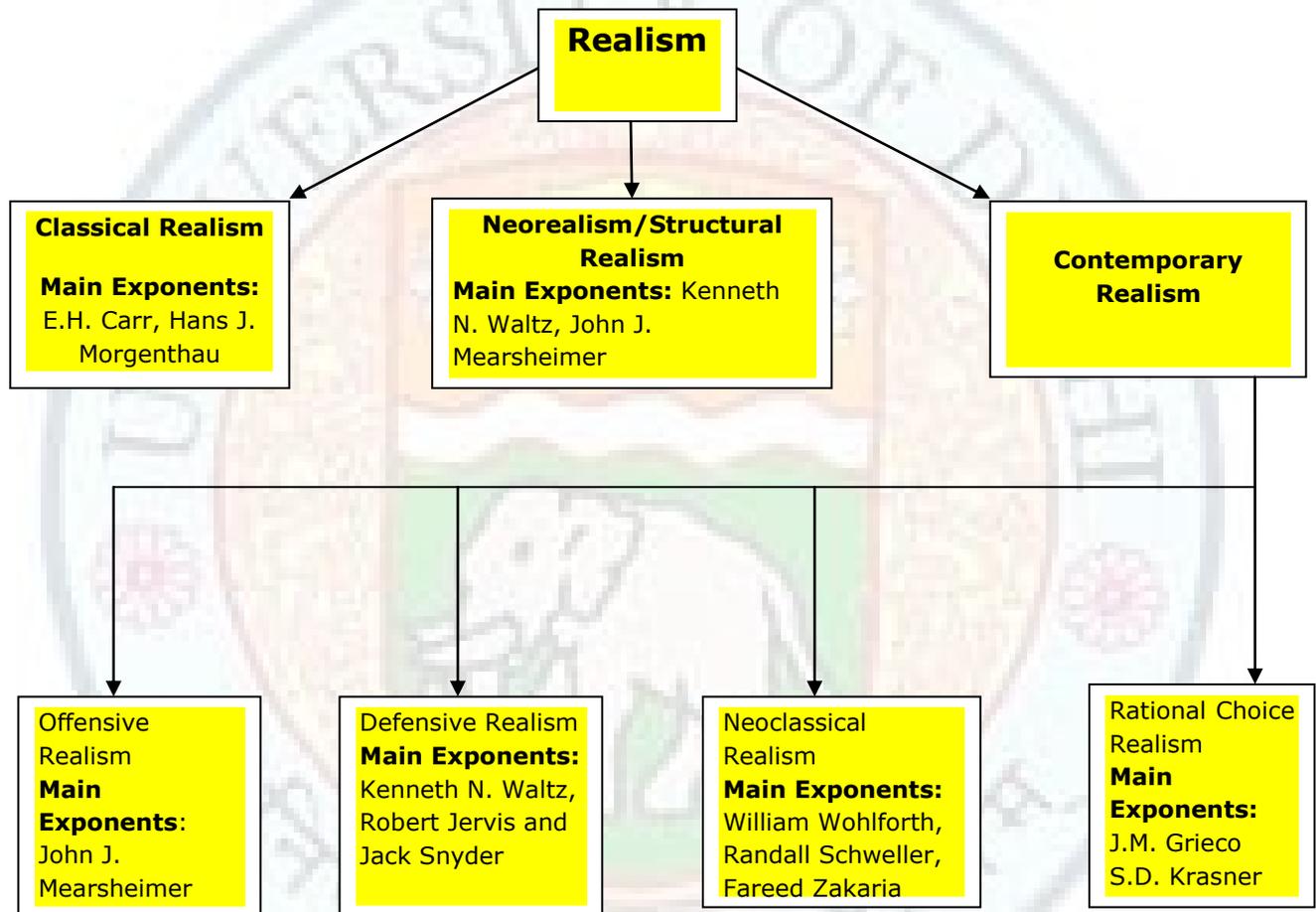
4.3 How Far Neorealism is Relevant Today?

As it is argued that neorealism on account of its well-kept theoretical argument sought to fill in the vacuum left due to weaknesses of the classical realism, but in the wake of the collapse of bipolar world and rapid penetration of globalisation, weakening of state as dominant actor, it has also lost its relevance. The question is has realism lost its relevance in the changing dynamics of the post-Cold War era? Critics argue that the shape of the international system has changed fundamentally. The end of the Cold War and narrowing of

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the chances of major wars instead the prevalence of intra-state conflicts; the evolving identities and interests; the growing importance of international institutions and the impact of globalisation on the world politics have changed the features of the world system.⁸⁴ Such developments strengthen the voices, which pose question against the relevance of realism/neorealism.

Realism and Its variants: Diagrammatical Presentation



The neo-neo debate—the debate between neorealism and neoliberalism—is no longer concerned with the questions of morality and human nature, but with the extent to which state behaviour is influenced by anarchic structure rather than by institutions, learning, and other factors that are conducive to cooperation.⁸⁵ Eroding sovereignty and compromised role of states and emerging challenge of how to accommodate with newer actors, NGOs, INGOs, and other national and international civil society and finally with new regimes are causing question marks on basic tenets of neorealism which restrict its analysis keeping state its focus of central analysis.

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Obsessed with security, neorealism again places its view keeping state its main referent object. This has scathingly attacked by exponents of nonconventional security. First, they argue that defining security merely in military terms conveys false image of reality. It is because this worldview, and the security that it defines, masks the actual issues threatening the people. Secondly, military security often neglects the protection of the individual due to an over-attention on the state. Thus, it causes states to concentrate on the military threats and to ignore other and perhaps more alarming threats to the survival of individual. While the truth is that state is the *means*; security of individual is the *end*.⁸⁶

However, replying to such questions against the relevance of neorealism and its tenets, Waltz says that the fundamental features of the international system have not yet changed. The international system, as Michael E. Brown views, is still anarchic in that states and other actors still have to provide their own security; there is no international authority capable of providing security for one and all.⁸⁷ It seems more as continuity rather than change. Neorealist such as Kenneth Waltz put forward their assertion that states are still the dominant actors in the international system and, states are still determined to preserve their survival.⁸⁸ The result is that security competitions and confrontations will still be common features of international relations in the 21st century. Despite realism's failure in explaining the structural changes in the international system or its inadequacy in comprehending emerging security challenges it would be unmindful to invalidate its importance outrightly.⁸⁹

The Fall of Berlin Wall: A Symbol of the Changes in the International System Prevalent from 1945 to 1990



Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thefalloftheberlinwall1989.JPG>

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5. Summary

Realism is considered to be the main approach to the study of IR. This approach virtually transfigured the discipline through its trenchant analysis of post World War II international politics. However, the core ideas championed by the present day realism have their roots in world's few great thinkers' classic works in the ancient and medieval period. In modern period, especially in the post-War era in the twentieth century Morgenthau along with some leading exponents gave a new elevation to realism by an immaculate theoretical scheme. Realism focuses on the centrality of the role of state in the international politics, which seeks to pursue the national interest through power. Realism posits that politics is governed by laws that are created by human nature. Thus, the mechanism we use to understand international politics is through the concept of interest defined in terms of power. For realism, if national interest is the end then power is the means. That is why every nation wants to acquire more and more power. This makes, according to a leading realist, international politics indispensably an arena of struggle for power. Besides, other strand of realism, instead of relying on human nature to discover the roots of international politics, take into account the absence of central authority in the international system. To them, anarchy is the principal condition which shapes the international political outcomes. The lack of a common authority necessitates states to a "self-help system". To put simply, all states are bound to take every possible measure which could ensure their survival. At the same time they can do their utmost to identify their best of national interests and ensure acquiring that much of power so that they can pursue their interest comfortably. Another factor, anarchy, leads to a situation in which power has the paramount role in shaping relations among nations. However, with the demise of the Cold War and consequently the end of the bloc politics, and the emergence of new international order, the questions are being posed against the relevance of realism. Realists are attempting to answer them, but alternative approaches to international relations are eroding the importance of realism it has enjoyed in the twentieth century.

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6. Glossary

- **Hegemony:** The term, used and popularised by the Frankfurt School, denotes the influence (predominance) a great power wields against other states within the system. Such domination has varied manifestation. It may range from military, economic, political to cultural domination.
- **Interdependence:** In international relations it describes a kind of relationships between two parties in which they appear to be dependent mutually on each other. It also emphasizes that the costs of losing their relations or of reducing their exchanges impair interests of both equally.
- **Anarchy:** Anarchy denotes absence of hierarchy. Precisely, it signifies nonexistence of authoritative control over a system.
- **Relative Gains:** States in international system appear to be concerned with distribution of gains with cooperation. Envy that other would gain more constraints the motivation of states to cooperate. In the international system, states are not quite interested about "absolute gains" but they are more concerned about "whether someone may benefit more than someone else".
- **Sovereignty:** It is an attribute of a state by virtue of which a state has supreme authority internally as well as externally
- **Self-Help:** In an anarchical environment, states cannot keep themselves in illusion that their defense is guaranteed by other state(s); this uncertainty compel states to ensure self-help. The notion is vigorously used by the realist theorists of IR.
- **Survival:** Survival in the realist literature implies that a state strives on its own through various means at its disposal to maintain its independent existence in the international society.
- **Power:** In international relations power is attributed to an ability of a state to wield influence in the international system. It is defined by most realists in terms of the important resources which include armed forces, gross national product, and population that a state possesses.
- **Statism:** In realist discourses of IR, it is regarded as state and its core values being the main object to be secured. Core values are territorial integrity, political independence and sovereignty of the state. This idea is known as statism.

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7. Essay Type Questions

1. Explain in detail the evolutionary stages of realism from ancient period till date.
2. Explain that realism is an umbrella theory which embraces many variants of it.
3. Examine the basic assumptions of classical realism with special reference to Morgenthau's six principles.
4. What are the basic premises of neo-realism? Assess the contribution of Kenneth N. Waltz to neo-realist approach to international relations.
5. What are main objections against neo-realism? Explain how critical theorists, constructivists, postmodernist and feminists discredit neo-realist assumptions about international politics.
6. In your opinion how far realism is relevant in the contemporary international relations?

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8. Multiple Choice Questions

Choose the correct answer:

1. Who has written the book *The Art of War*?
[A] Thucydides [B] Kautilya
[C] Sun Tzu [D] Morgenthau
2. Who portrayed the human nature negatively by laying down as: Men are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain.
[A] Spencer [B] Locke
[C] Machiavelli [D] Wilson
3. Who pioneered the realist theory in IR after World War II period?
[A] Kelson [B] Morgenthau
[C] Keohane [D] Walt
4. The main exponents of neorealism is
[A] E.H. Carr [B] George Kennan
[C] Reinhold Niebuhr [D] Kenneth Waltz
5. Defensive neorealism stresses upon
[A] Security maximization [B] Power maximization [C] Complex interdependence [D] Soft power

Answers: 1-[C], 2-[C], 3-[B], 4-[D], 5-[A]

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