

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

Programme: Bachelor of Arts (TY BA)

Subject: Political Science

Paper Code: POD 101

Paper Title: International Relations-DSE

Unit: II

Module Name: Neo-Realism

Module No: 11

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Notes

Ist and IInd world war, the two cyclonic events of world history largely shaped and influenced the discipline of International Relations. Post IInd world war, the world was divided into two main ideological groupings, Capitalism and Communism or Socialism. The 'Capitalist ideological grouping was led by United States of America (USA) whereas Communist or Socialist ideological grouping was led by Union of Soviet Socialist Republic or Soviet Union (USSR). The rivalry between the then superpowers US and USSR, gave a firm grounding to Realist approach.

Theory of realism believes that, the human nature being selfish, states run by human beings also tend to behave in a selfish manner. Therefore it is impossible to think that states will cooperate. Throughout 1950's and 1960's, theory of realism dominated the field of IR. However, the period of détente between US and USSR gave a severe blow to realist thinking. The détente is a period of relaxing tension between USA and Soviet Union. It lasted from 1969-1972. The phase of détente created a puzzle in realist circle. The puzzle was, why cooperation exist between seemingly rival states?

It is in this background theory of neo-realism took shape. Kenneth waltz 'Theory of International Politics' serve as a pioneering work for the doctrine of neo-realism. Kenneth waltz's version of realism is known as structural realism.

The basic tenets of the 'Theory of Neo-Realism' can be summed up in following points.

1. Kenneth Waltz's Anarchic nature of international system
2. Neo-Realists Conception of Power
3. Balance of Power
4. Security Dilemma
5. Grieco's Concept of Gains in International System
6. Offensive and Defensive Neo-Realism

1. Kenneth Waltz's Anarchic nature of international system: According to neo-realists, at international level, no institution can control the behaviour of individual states. Lack of control makes international system anarchic. Anarchy means lawlessness, lack of proper control. Here the international system is like a classroom without a teacher. In the absence of teacher, students behave the way they want resulting in anarchy. Similarly, at international level there is no agency which can control the action of individual states. Even the United Nations has failed number of times to control the actions of states, especially powerful states like US or China. Thus, it is anarchic nature of international system compels the state to behave in an anarchic manner.

Here, Neo-Realists differ with Realist. Realists focus is on the actions of individual states whereas Neo-Realists focuses on the structure of international system. For realist it is the actions of individual states makes international system anarchic. On the contrary, neo-realist argue that the international system by default being anarchic due to lack of control, Therefore according to neo-realists, the actions of the states based on human nature does not make international system anarchic but anarchical nature of the international system compels the state to behave in a selfish manner.

2. Neo-Realists Conception of Power: Neo-Realist conception of power is significantly different from realist in two major ways. Firstly, Realist define power only in terms of military power whereas neo-realist pays attention to forms of power other than military power such as diplomatic, economic, political, social etc. Thus neo-realists broaden the definition of power. Secondly, realist treat power as be-all and end-all of international

politics, whereas, for Neo-Realist power is only a means to achieve an end and not an end in itself.

3. **Balance of Power:** States at an international level differs in power and status. International system is an anarchical place where self-interest rule. Smaller and weaker states joins the alliances of powerful states. Similarly powerful states to increase their power and status offer an alliances to weaker states. This phenomena in international system is known as balance of power. Such alliances was clearly visible during the cold war era. Two superpowers created an alliances in form of NATO lead by US and Warsaw Pact lead by Soviet Union. Both the superpowers were trying to do was balancing their power vis-à-vis other.
4. **Security Dilemma:** In an anarchical world, actions of the state are guided by self-survival. Because of the absence of a central authority every state is under the constant pressure of increasing their defensive capacity. For example, India is aware about the threats from Pakistan. Pakistan could attack India any time. Therefore, India needs to be prepared to face this situation. In order to increase the defensive capacity, India will invest in building arms and ammunition. Indian investment in arms and ammunition is seen as a threat by Pakistan. So Pakistan, also invest in weapons in order to remain prepared for the military threat from India. This action of Pakistan is seen as a threat by India. This situation in IR is known as security Dilemma. Security Dilemma results in arms race.
5. **Grieco's Concept of Gains in International System:** Realist completely rules out the possibility of the cooperation. However, Neo-Realists believe that states do cooperate for gains. Grieco differentiates between two types of gains. Relative and absolute. Absolute gains means total gains. According to Grieco, states cooperate because of their desire to achieve total gains. States cooperate by entering into an alliance or by signing a treaty. However, once they enter into an alliance they get interested in relative gains i.e. how much my country is gaining through this alliance or treaty. If they feel their respective state is benefitting less from the multilateral alliance then the leaders take the decision of breaking out of the alliance and functioning unilaterally. For e.g. BREXIT. Britain took the decision of coming out from the multilateral arrangement of EU because,

it felt, it is losing in comparison to other states. Therefore, Britain decided to act unilaterally. Therefore to Grieco, a question hunting states involved in multilateral alliance is, who will gain more if I cooperate? This scepticism makes cooperation a difficult task.

6. Offensive and Defensive Neo-Realism: Realist in these area prefer to call themselves as modern realist and not neo-realist. This approach is theoretical cum policy oriented approach. John Mearsheimer is an offensive neo-realist sympathizer. Offensive meaning aggressive. Offensive neo-realist suggest that state should be involved in aggressive expansion to expand their power and influence. Such policy currently is followed by china wherein China is involved in expansion of its territory. For instance, China's conquest of Tibet and constant attack on Indian borders, Chinas claims over the islands in South China Sea, similarly China's acquisition of ports throughout the globe. Thus offensive neo-realist suggest that State should pursue a policy which weakens their potential enemy and makes them all powerful.

However, Defensive neo-realists such as Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder suggest that, the Offensive expansionist policies drives the country in constant war with all other states. War costs the exchequer which will result in the weakening of economic power. Therefore states should be involved in defensive policies. Defensive policies involves two things. 1) Keeping the state ready for the war like situation by investing in arms and ammunition but exercising constraints over unnecessary wars. 2) Entering into security alliances like NATO and signing of arms control treaties. This actions will build a confidence amongst the states and reduce the tension.

Thus without changing the basic premises of Realism, Neo-Realist makes Realist approach more relevant.