

## **Realism in International Relations**

Realism is a theoretical perspective in international relations (IR) that emphasizes power, national interest, and the anarchic nature of the international system. It assumes that states are the primary actors and that their behavior is driven by self-interest and survival.

Realism in Practice (Historical Examples)

- Peloponnesian War (Thucydides' Trap) – Power struggle between Athens and Sparta.
- Cold War – U.S. and Soviet Union engaged in power balancing, alliances, and arms races.
- Russia-Ukraine Conflict – Realist perspective sees Russia's actions as a security-driven response to NATO expansion.
- U.S.-China Rivalry – Potential power transition dynamic, with China challenging U.S. dominance.

## **Core Assumptions of Realism**

1. State-Centrism – States are the most important actors in international politics.
2. Anarchy – The international system lacks a central authority, leading to a self-help system.
3. Power Politics – States compete for power and security, often leading to conflict.
4. National Interest – States act rationally to maximize their national interest, primarily security and survival.
5. Pessimistic View of Human Nature – Humans (and states) are inherently self-interested and competitive.
6. Balance of Power – Stability is maintained when power is distributed among states to prevent any single state from dominating.

Hans Morgenthau was a key figure in classical realism, shaping the realist school of thought in international relations. His work, **Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace (1948)**, outlines provides six principles of political realism, emphasizing power politics and the role of human nature in international affairs.

## **Morgenthau's Six Principles of Political Realism**

1. Politics is Governed by Objective Laws Rooted in Human Nature: According to Morgenthau, Human nature is constant, characterized by self-interest and the desire for power. International politics follows predictable patterns based on power struggles. This principle rejects idealistic views that assume morality or law alone can govern global politics.
2. National Interest Defined in Terms of Power: The primary goal of states is to pursue their national interest, which Morgenthau equates with power. Power is the ability to control or influence others and is central to foreign policy decisions. States act rationally, weighing the costs and benefits of actions to maximize their power and security.

### **3. Power and Interest are Dynamic, Not Fixed:**

The concept of power changes over time based on historical and political contexts. Power can take many forms, including military strength, economic resources, diplomacy, and political influence. A state's national interest is not static but evolves based on internal and external conditions.

4. Realism Recognizes the Moral Significance of Politics, but Morality is Contextual: While ethics and morality matter, they must be viewed through the lens of political reality. States may act immorally if necessary to protect their survival or interests. There is no universal morality in international politics; moral principles must be adapted to national interests.

5. No Universal Moral Laws Can Govern International Politics: Moral aspirations of a particular nation (e.g., democracy, human rights) \*should not be equated with universal morality. International relations operate in an anarchic system where each state prioritizes its own security and interests. Attempts to impose universal moral values often fail or lead to conflicts (e.g., U.S. interventions justified on democratic values).

6. Realism Focuses on the Autonomy of Politics:

Politics must be analyzed separately from economics, law, or ethics.

Unlike liberalism, which seeks cooperation, realism focuses on power struggles, conflict, and survival. Political realism dismisses the idea that economic or cultural interdependence alone can prevent war.

#### Criticism of Morgenthau's Realism

Too Pessimistic: Critics argue that realism underestimates the potential for cooperation, diplomacy, and economic interdependence.

Neglects Non-State Actors: Focuses on state-centric power struggles, ignoring the role of NGOs, multinational corporations, and transnational movements.

Ignores Domestic Politics: Assumes states act rationally based on power, without considering internal political dynamics.

Fails to Explain Change: Does not fully account for the emergence of peaceful international orders, such as the European Union.

In spite of drawbacks, it cannot be denied the fact that Morgenthau's principles of realism provide a foundational understanding of international relations, emphasizing power, national interest, and the limitations of morality in global politics. His ideas continue to shape realist thought, influencing debates on foreign policy, security studies, and global power dynamics.

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### **B. Neorealism (Structural Realism)**

Neorealism also called Structural Realism is a theory of international relations developed in response to classical realism. It was introduced by Kenneth Waltz in his book "Theory of International Politics (1979)." Neorealism shifts the focus from human nature (as emphasized by classical realists like Hans Morgenthau) to the structure of the international system as the key determinant of state behavior.

Examples of Neorealism in Action:

Cold War (Bipolarity) – U.S. and USSR balanced each other to maintain stability.

U.S.-China Rivalry – Mearsheimer's offensive realism predicts China will challenge U.S. dominance.

NATO and Russia– Russia views NATO expansion as a threat, leading to conflicts like Ukraine.

### **Types of Neorealism:**

A. **Defensive Realism:** supported and developed by Kenneth Waltz. Defensive realism is that

states seek only enough power to ensure security. Too much power can provoke counterbalancing from other states. Example: The Cold War – The U.S. and USSR maintained balance to avoid war. China's Peaceful Rise Strategy – China initially focused on economic growth rather than military aggression to avoid U.S. counterbalancing.

Nuclear Deterrence – Countries like India and Pakistan develop nuclear weapons only for deterrence, not expansion.

Core Assumptions of defensive realism

1. States prioritize security over power – Excessive power expansion provokes counterbalancing.
2. Balance of Power maintains stability – States will form alliances to prevent any state from becoming too strong.
3. Anarchy leads to caution, not aggression – States seek to avoid unnecessary wars.
4. Overexpansion is risky – Pursuing too much power can harm a state's security.

B. **Offensive Realism:** Supported and developed by John Mearsheimer. Offensive realism is that States seek to maximize power to dominate the system and achieve regional hegemony.

The international system compels states to act aggressively.

Examples of Offensive Realism in action:

U.S. Hegemony Post-Cold War – The U.S. expanded its influence through NATO and military interventions.

China's Expansion in the South China Sea – Mearsheimer argues China is seeking regional dominance, not just defense.

Hitler's Expansion in World War II – Germany sought absolute dominance rather than just security.

Core Assumptions of offensive realism :

1. States seek to maximize power – The best way to ensure security is to dominate the system.
2. The international system compels aggression– If a state does not seek power, others will, putting it at risk.
3. Hegemony is the ultimate goal – Regional or global dominance ensures long-term security.
4. Balancing is ineffective – A powerful state should not fear counterbalancing and must act aggressively when opportunities arise.

### **Core Assumptions of Neorealism :**

#### **1. Anarchic International System**

The international system lacks a central authority (no world government).

States operate in a self-help system, where survival depends on their own power.

#### **2. State-Centric Approach**

States are the primary actors in international politics.

They behave rationally to maximize their security and interests.

#### **3. Power is the Key to Security**

States seek power, but their goal is security, not power for its own sake.

The amount of power a state pursues depends on its position in the system.

#### **4. Distribution of Capabilities Determines Outcomes**

The structure of the international system is defined by the distribution of power (unipolarity, bipolarity, multipolarity).

States act based on their relative power compared to others.

#### **5. Balance of Power Mechanism**

States form alliances to counterbalance stronger powers and prevent dominance.

This ensures no single state becomes too powerful.

### **Key Principles of Waltz's Neo-Realism:**

#### **1. Structure of International System:**

The primary focus of neo-realism is on the structure of the international system rather than individual state behavior.

The international system is **anarchic** (absence of a central authority), where no supreme power regulates the behavior of states.

## 2. **Anarchy as a Defining Feature:**

The absence of a world government creates a self-help system.

States must rely on their own capabilities to ensure survival.

## 3. **State as the Primary Actor:**

States are the most important actors in international relations. Other actors like international organizations or non-state actors are considered secondary.

## 4. **Survival as the Primary Goal:**

The ultimate objective of every state is survival. National security and self-preservation dominate state policies.

## 5. **Distribution of Capabilities:**

Power is distributed unevenly among states. The international system is hierarchical based on the military and economic capabilities of states.

## 6. **Balance of Power:**

States seek to balance power to maintain stability. Alliances and counter-alliances are formed to prevent domination by one state.

## 7. **Relative Gains over Absolute Gains:**

States are more concerned with how much power they have relative to others rather than overall wealth or welfare. Cooperation is difficult because states fear that others will gain more.

## 8. **Defensive Realism:**

Waltz emphasized that states seek enough power to ensure security, not to dominate others.

Excessive accumulation of power may provoke counterbalancing by other states.

## 9. **Minimal Role of Ideology or Morality:**

Waltz dismisses the role of morality, ideology, or domestic politics in shaping state behavior.

International politics is driven by power dynamics, not ethical considerations.

## 10. Systemic Approach:

Waltz's theory focuses on how the structure of the international system influences state behavior rather than individual decisions or leadership.

### Criticism of Waltz's Neo-Realism:

1. Ignores Domestic Politics – Neorealism treats states as unitary actors, ignoring internal politics, ideology, and leadership.
2. Neglects Non-State Actors – Focuses on states while ignoring NGOs, multinational corporations, and terrorist groups.
3. Too Deterministic – Suggests states have little choice due to the system's structure.
4. Limited Explanation for Change – Struggles to explain peaceful transformations (e.g., the EU's success in cooperation).

Waltz's **Neo-Realism** remains one of the most influential theories in International Relations. It provides a systematic explanation of state behavior by highlighting how the anarchic nature of the international system shapes competition, power dynamics, and the pursuit of security. However, its rigid focus on structure and neglect of non-state actors make it less applicable to contemporary global challenges.

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### Meaning, Scope, and Nature of International Relations

International Relations (IR) is the **study of political, economic, social, and cultural interactions among countries** and other global actors. It focuses on how countries cooperate, compete, and resolve conflicts in the international system.

In simple terms, International Relations deals with the relationships between **nations, international organizations, non-state actors, and individuals** in the global arena. For example:

- The **India-Bangladesh Water Sharing Treaty (1996)** on the Ganga river is an example of peaceful cooperation between two nations.
- The **Russia-Ukraine War (2022)** is an example of conflict in international relations.
- The **United Nations (UN)** working to provide humanitarian aid in war zones is an example of international cooperation.

International Relations is an essential subject that helps us understand how nations interact in an interconnected world. It not only deals with war and peace but also includes economic cooperation, diplomacy, and global challenges. The nature and scope of IR show that it is a broad and dynamic field, reflecting the complexity of modern global issues.

By studying International Relations, we can promote **global peace, cooperation, and development** in the face of rising conflicts and challenges.

## **Nature of International Relations:**

The **nature of International Relations** refers to the basic characteristics and fundamental aspects that define the subject.

### **1. Dynamic Nature:**

International Relations is not static; it keeps changing due to political, social, and economic developments in the world. Example: The shift in global power from the USA to China in recent years.

### **2. Interdisciplinary Subject:**

IR combines various fields like **Political Science, History, Economics, International Law, Geography, and Sociology**. Example: Climate change agreements involve both politics and environmental science (Paris Climate Agreement).

### **3. Anarchic System:**

The international system operates without any central authority, where each country works for its own interest. Example: Nuclear arms race between countries like the USA, Russia, and North Korea.

### **4. Power Politics:**

Power plays a key role in international relations where countries seek to protect their own interests. Example: The rivalry between the USA and China for global dominance.

### **5. Conflict and Cooperation:**

International Relations involves both **conflict (war)** and **cooperation (peace agreements)**. Example: The Russia-Ukraine war (conflict) and the European Union (cooperation).

### **6. Global Perspective:**

It deals with worldwide issues like **human rights, terrorism, climate change, and economic development**. Example: UN initiatives for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **Scope:**

The **scope of International Relations** refers to the different areas and issues that the subject covers.

**Political Relations:** Study of foreign policies, diplomacy, and power politics. Example India-USA Strategic Partnership.

**Economic Relations:**

Trade, investment, and financial cooperation . For example World Trade Organization (WTO)

**International Law:** It studies legal rules and agreements between countries. Example: Geneva Conventions for war prisoners

**Peace and Conflict Studies:** Study of wars, terrorism, and conflict resolution. Example, UN Peacekeeping Missions

**International Organizations:** Role of global bodies in world politics . Example United Nations, World Health Organization

**Environmental Issues:** IR is concerned to global cooperation on climate. Example: change Paris Climate Agreement

**Human Rights:** Deals with protection of human rights and humanitarian aid. For example: Amnesty International campaigns

### **Importance of International Relations:**

- Promotes **peaceful cooperation** among nations.
- Helps in **conflict resolution** and diplomacy.
- Facilitates **economic cooperation and trade agreements**.
- Addresses global issues like **climate change and terrorism**.
- Strengthens **international organizations** like the UN and WHO.

The nature and scope of International Relations highlight its importance in understanding how nations interact in a globalized world. It is a **dynamic and interdisciplinary field** that goes beyond politics to include economic, legal, environmental, and human rights issues. As the world faces new challenges like climate change, terrorism, and global conflicts, the study of International Relations becomes even more significant in promoting **peace, cooperation, and global development**.

### **Differences between International Relations and International Politics:**

International Relations and International Politics are two important concepts in political science. While both deal with interactions between countries, they are not the same. International Politics focuses mainly on **power, diplomacy, and conflict among nations**, whereas International Relations covers a **broader range of global interactions** including economic, social, cultural, and environmental issues.

### **Differences between International Relations and International Politics:**

#### **International Relations**

1. Study of all types of interactions between nations (political, economic, cultural, and social)
2. Broader scope, includes **politics, trade, culture, law, and environment**
3. It is Cooperative and conflictual in nature.
4. It includes **states, international organizations,**

#### **International Politics**

1. Study of political and power-based relations between countries
2. Narrow scope, focuses only on **politics, power, and diplomacy**
3. Mainly conflict-oriented (power struggles)
4. Focuses mainly on **nation-states**

## **International Relations**

### **NGOs, MNCs, and individuals**

5. World Trade Organization (WTO) working for free trade (Example)

6. Promotes **peaceful cooperation** and global development

7. It has multidisciplinary (politics, economy, environment) approach.

## **International Politics**

5. India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir

6. Focuses on **power struggle and national security**

7. Its approach is political and military-centered

International Relations is a broader concept that studies all types of interactions between nations and global actors including political, economic, cultural, and social aspects. On the other hand, International Politics focuses mainly on political relations, power struggles, and diplomacy. While International Politics is an important part of International Relations, the latter provides a more comprehensive understanding of the global system. Both fields are essential to maintaining peace, cooperation, and order in the world.