
UNIT 2 EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS*

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit is about the emergence of International Relations as an independent and separate academic discipline. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Trace the evolution of the discipline of International Relations
- Identify different stages in the development of International Relations as a discipline
- Explain the causes for the changes in different stages of the discipline

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The origin and evolution of International Relations (IR) as the subject of study and as an independent discipline have several theories and interpretations. Besides, the dynamic nature of events at the global level and the ever-changing scope of the discipline makes it even more difficult to talk about the exact nature of the evolution of IR. However, it is a fact that the history of IR can be traced back to thousands of years; to the prevalence of interaction among the Sumerian city-states dating back to 3500 B.C. The Greek city-states had their international system with norms of war and peace. But we cannot mark the origin of international relations to these periods as they do not fulfil the basic requirement to be called as International Relations. The history of modern International Relations is more precisely related to the origin of the nation-state system in the 17th century. In this context, the Peace Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 which recognised the idea of sovereign nation-states can be regarded as the real beginning of International Relations. Before this treaty, European medieval organisation of political authority was based on a vaguely hierarchical religious order. However, about the Westphalian treaty also, indeed, there existed still embodied layered systems of sovereignty, especially within the Holy Roman Empire. That is why,

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more than this treaty, it is the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 which can be considered as a more appropriate document delineating the sovereign state. Because it reflected an emerging norm that the sovereign had no external superiors as the ultimate authority within the territory's sovereign borders. As with the origin, there is a difference in terms of scope and activities of the IR. Hence it is necessary to have a critical appraisal of the evolution of the discipline of International Relations.

2.2 STAGES OF EVOLUTION

From the First World War to the present times, International Relations has passed through different stages of evolution. Besides, the journey of its efforts to make it an independent discipline also started with the end of the First World War. This journey of International Relations for becoming a separate discipline can be understood by analysing its evolution and direction of the changing contours of interaction among states.

2.2.1 Diplomatic History Stage (1648-1919)

Until the First World War (1914-18), the study of IR was dominated by historians rather than political scientists. At this stage, the study of IR mainly centred around the state system. Individual scholars also identified and organised themselves in sovereign states and through them strove to fulfil their interests. That is why no organised and systematic study of international relations was made in universities anywhere in the world. Only in a few courses dealing with history, law and theology etc, initial efforts were made to study a wide variety of current international problems. But all this was done in a very unsystematic and superficial manner. No real attempt was made to study and analyse IR in an organised and systematic manner to give it the shape and stature of a distinctive subject. The only exception is the pioneering effort of Paul S. Reinsch, who in 1900 delivered lectures on world politics at the University of Wisconsin.

Despite the existence of the state system, however, not all states accepted every other state. The norms of universality and sovereign equality were still nebulous and often questioned by powerful states. Truth is, some of the states had only partial attributes; they were small principalities and fiefdoms owing their allegiance to some big empire or a strong man. Some states were significant because of their neighbourhood; while others were due to their economic or military might. Some others due to their cultured or ethnic peculiarities. Thus, inter-state relations existed due to sovereign states and it constituted the agenda of international relations. However, relations between two or more states acquired complexities and divergent implications due to a variety of factors like economy, geography, military, historical, social, cultural, religious, ideological, strategic, and leadership. As a result, there emerged a situation of conflict or cooperation among them and the same became the area of study of international relations. Since both these aspects continued to remain part of the behaviour of states, international relations also was constrained to study both dimensions of conflict and cooperation. Thus, in the real sense of the term, despite the emergence of nation-states, international relations did not develop much till the First World War.

Since the study of International Relations was dominated by diplomatic historians the basic trends of this era were as follows:

- 1) Most of the study was descriptive and no effort was made to develop the causal relationship.
- 2) Instead of analysing the events based on various factors and forces, most studies of the period were chronological descriptions of the events, recorded partially.
- 3) Most studies were rooted to know the historical past and no effort was made to analyse the contemporary events. Therefore, the study of contemporary events and developments did not receive the importance it deserved.
- 4) Since most of the studies were not done systematically, they lacked scientific rigour towards theory building.
- 5) Since most studies were descriptive and chronicled the events without any effort to find a causal relationship, the discipline of International Relations lacked empirical and scientific grounding.

Thus, in the years before World War I, studies in International Relations were predominantly in the form of historical and diplomatic writings. This disrupted the growth of the analytical, theoretical, and contemporary study of the IR. Therefore, this era was devoid of the development of theories of the discipline. Besides, systematic and comprehensive growth of the subject was also missing during this period.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the Unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Identify the features of the study of International Relations before World War I.

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2.2.2 Current Events Stage (1919-1945)

The First World War had a tremendous impact on the study of International Relations. It was only after the War that teaching of the subject of International Relations was initiated in the various universities in the United Kingdom, United States of America, and Switzerland. The teaching of the subject as a formal academic discipline started with the founding of international professorship in the UK. In 1919, Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Relations was established at Aberystwyth, the University of Wales (now Aberystwyth University). The first person to hold this chair was Alfred Eckhart Zimmer. Simultaneously, in the same year, Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service was founded in the USA. In early 1920, the department of international relations was established at London School of Economics at the

behest of Nobel Peace Prize winner Philip Noel-Baker. This was the first institute to offer a wide range of degrees in IR. Numerous other universities in the USA and Switzerland also followed this trend. Later, the London School of Economics and at Oxford, Montague Boston Professor of International Relations was created which gave further impetus to the study of international relations

In 1927, the first university entirely devoted to the study of international relations, the Graduate Institute of International Studies, was established in Geneva. It was meant to train diplomats for the League of Nations. In 1928, Chicago University started offering a graduate course in International Relations. Then in 1933, Harvard and Tufts University jointly started Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy which was the only school in the USA offering graduate degree in IR. Later, such courses were offered in some other universities as well.

During this era, some significant changes in the study of international relations were noticed. Salient ones of them inter alia were:

- 1) This phase focused on current events and happenings in international relations. A past study of diplomatic history was replaced by an interest in current affairs.
- 2) Despite the neglect of historical descriptions, an integrative knowledge of international relations was still not attained. Because at least to understand the contemporary developments, contextualization of the same in its timing and space was required. Hence complete neglect of history led to the limited knowledge of international relations.
- 3) Complete and total dependence on current affairs was not enough for a correct knowledge of IR. This kind of detachment and compartmentalization led to the lopsided reading of international relations.
- 4) Lack of complete study of past and present with appropriate linkages in the study of international relations were missing. As a result, theory-building was absent during this period too. In the absence of a long-term historical perspective to drive common consensual finding, the element of predictability in the working of international relations again went missing.

2.2.3 Law and Organisation Stage (1919-1945)

The period between the two world wars witnessed a strong trend regarding the growth of international legal organisations. It emphasized the institutionalization of international relations through the development of a legal organizational setup. It was assumed that with the growth of such an institutional arrangement, problems of the international system will automatically get resolved. Therefore, the emphasis was to identify goals and values which would facilitate the growth of peaceful world order. This kind of thinking was based on idealism, optimism and hope that with the growth of some legal and institutional setup, issues of conflict, violence and war could be overcome. This type of approach was thus based on an emotional and visionary outlook of its supporter. As a result, the idea of League of Nations was conceived as part of the treaty of peaceful resolution of conflict after the First World War. It was thought that issue of war and conflict in past were linked to the thinking of power enhancement, the balance of power and demonstration of power which was not appropriate; rather only through law

and organisation states can attain the goal of peace. This belief was based on the strength of individual and collective morality found in men and state.

The increased emphasis on law and organisation had the following implications for international relations:

- 1) Though the emphasis on institutional setup based on law and organization was based more on idealism, morality and vision for peace; yet, it was beyond the prevailing relations of the time and non-comprehension of interests of the state. Therefore, it was far from the existing realities of international relations.
- 2) The establishment of global peace is dependent on multiple and complex variables than the wishful thinking and narrow outlook of legal and organizational structure. Hence, the thrust on institutionalization did not factor in the dynamism of international relations. This became apparent when the League of Nations failed to establish international peace.
- 3) Despite their best effort to evolve some framework and establishment of League of Nations, no general theorization of international politics was developed during the period.
- 4) There is a clear difference between suggestions for reforms at the international level by the states and the pursuit of their national interests. Most powers agreed on the Charter of the League of Nations for the observation of peace, but when issues were confronted by them against their perceived national interest, they left the League, rather than observe the mandate of the Charter.

Thus, this era also failed to understand and analyse the complex phenomenon, called International Relations. Nor the creation of an international legal and institutional setup facilitated the establishment of peace. There were no efforts to evolve a general theory to understand this phenomenon. Therefore, the need for a sound framework of peace was still required. Thus, due to parochial vision which remained restricted to law and organization, the study of IR during this era prevented the real understanding of dynamic and complex forces of International Relations.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the Unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) What were the features of International Relations studies during the interwar years?

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2.2.4 Scientific Studies Stage (1945-1991)

After the end of World War II, international politics underwent a significant transformation in terms of its nature and scope. On one hand, the emergence of new states of Asia and Africa enhanced the membership of the global community; and thereby, made international politics truly international. Simultaneous to this phenomenon, the onset of Cold War between the then two superpowers led to the requirement of the study of conflict, proxy wars, arms race, nuclear threat, détente, the balance of power etc. as new issues in international relations. Besides, a new dimension came to be added in the form of non-state actors, who began to strongly influence and shape the working of international relations. These non-state actors were both political like Amnesty International and economic like the multinational corporations (MNCs). As a result of power rivalry and Cold War tensions, theoretical approaches to the study of peace and the world order studies also acquired important space in International Relations. Thus, global politics acquired new dimensions that demanded the discarding of earlier idealistic, moralistic, legal and institutional studies; and their replacement by rational and scientific studies.

Realism and Neo-Realism: As a result of the above developments, studies of 'Realism' and behaviouralism acquired importance in international relations. Hans J. Morgenthau has been regarded as the first realist thinker who propounded Realism as a theory for the study of International Relations.

Realism dominated the study of IR since the end of World War II. In 1948, Hans J. Morgenthau wrote his *Politics among Nations* and scholars have continued to refer to the book ever since. Morgenthau and other Realists drew ideas from philosophers such as Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and others. Their writings on variety of subjects and themes about IR were clubbed together and labelled by critics as 'Classical Realism'. Core arguments in 'Classical Realism' are as follows: (i) In IR, there is no scope for idealism; the failure of the League of Nations to ensure peace in the inter-war years is a good example of the misplaced belief in the goodness of human nature, scientific temperament, and the inevitability of material progress for the betterment of all. 'Classical Realists' point out the selfishness and brutishness in human nature, the corruptibility and self-serving tendency of institutions, and the anarchic and fluid character of the international system as realistic points to start any discussion on IR. (ii) 'Classical Realists' argued that there is no centralized authority to enforce the law at a global level; hence international relations operate in an anarchic, somewhat lawless, context. (iii) Here, every state is concerned with its preservation. Therefore, every state is guided by the pursuit of power and promotion of its self-interest. 'Classical Realism' was grounded in a mix of history, philosophy, and theology. As a theoretical framework of IR, it declined with the rise of social-scientific behaviourism in the 1960s.

The decade of 1970s marked the ascendance of 'Neo-Realism'. In his *Theory of International Politics* (1979), Kenneth Waltz argued that all-important features of international relations, especially the actions of great powers, could be explained in terms of the anarchical structure of the international system. Waltz tried to give 'Classical Realism' empirical bases but failed to do so, and have since been criticized for that. His 'Neo-Realism' differed from the 'Classical Realism' in two ways: (i) Waltz tried to give his ideas a scientific basis and drew

some ideas from economics. While doing this, he tried to shed 'Classical Realism' of its penchant to draw from history, sociology, theology and human nature. (ii) In building their theory of international relations, 'Classical Realists' considered variables such as domestic institutions, quality of diplomacy, the nature of statecraft, national morale and human nature. Waltz considered all of them as irrelevant in understanding IR.

Core arguments of Waltz's theory of 'Neo-Realism' are: (i) States are unitary rational actors existing in a self-help system. They are all concerned above all else with their survival; and, equally important, they all operate with imperfect information. (ii) Waltz makes an important statement: states are conditioned by the logic of the international system into similar patterns of behaviour. (iii) The trajectory of international relations is explained by the distribution of power across units (states) in the system. (iv) He argues that the international system, conceived in this way, has maintained remarkable continuity across space and time. (v) The most important argument of Waltz is that the most stable arrangement in an international system is bipolarity or a balance between two great powers.

Waltz's conception of IR remained influential in the 1980s and the 1990s. (i) Many have criticized his argument that states inherently find cooperation difficult. (ii) Critics further ask: what it is that the states want in the end: security or power? The so-called defensive 'Neo-Realists' answer: security. Since states seek foremost security, a stable international equilibrium is possible via balancing. The so-called offensive 'Neo-Realists' say power. Maximization of power makes attainment of equilibrium hard to achieve. No wonder, the international system always remains on tenterhooks. (iii) There are other grounds of criticism. 'Neo-Realism' has been faulted, for example, for neglecting the insights of history, sociology, and philosophy. Besides, most important, its claim of scientific validity is found false. (iv) 'Neo-Realism' also does not consider, nor in fact, it does explain, systemic transformations in IR. It cannot explain, for example, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War or, for that matter, the advent of globalization.

Systems theory: In the post Second World War period, one major development in the field of political science has been to make the study of the discipline more scientific through quantitative methodology with the study of behaviour.

What do we mean by systems theories? Systems theories of international relations (IR) give priority to the structure of the international system to explain the behaviour of states and interactions among them. States are the units of the system, and they collectively constitute a system of states. Most systems theories treat the relationship between the international system and states as reciprocal. However, it is the structure of the international system that strongly influences and shapes the behaviour of the states and interaction among states. Thus, what a state does or does not do at the international level can be explained by referring to the structures of the international system; and the way these structures impinged on the state. For the first time, systems theory came to treat the international system as the formal and independent variable. Systemic thinking became central to the study of IR in the second half of the 20th century, after the publication of Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* in 1979. IR scholars have continued to study and develop the strengths and weaknesses of Waltz's and others' systems approaches. No doubt, systems theorizing remains an important approach to the study of IR. However, not all theoretical assertions of systems

approaches have been empirically supported; there thus remains a strong debate about how much systems theories explain the IR and the behaviour of the states. Moreover, the notion of an international “system” and how to define it remain contested among IR scholars.

Systems theory assumes that basic parameters of the system can be integrated. Hence a general system theory can be developed. Though, as stated above, in terms of the meaning of ‘system’, there is a difference of opinion among scholars, but one thing is certain: systems theory has helped in the enrichment of theoretical studies of International Relations. Systems theory has widened the scope of the study by highlighting those dimensions of international relations which were not given adequate attention earlier.

Other theoretical frameworks: Other partial theories developed due to the influence of behaviouralism have been decision-making theory, game theory, communication theory and bargaining theory. They cannot be treated as full general theories of international relations because they are dealing with one aspect of it only, i.e. foreign policy analysis. This has been done through the evaluation of the behaviour of foreign policy or decision-makers. They are also based on the scientific method and value-free approach as suggested by behaviouralism.

Thus, in this era an effort was made by Realists and behaviouralist to study international relations in a scientific and realist manner, rather than the utopian, idealism, emotive, historical, diplomatic, ethical, legal and institutional frameworks. But both the studies suffered from serious weaknesses of not interpreting international relations holistically. In the case of the Realist approach, predominant issues have been the issue of struggle and conflict. An important aspect of cooperation has been missing, which is not only equal rather it is the aim of nation-states. Similarly, behaviouralism also ignored the value of peace in their craze for scientism issue and quantification. Besides, they all put more and more emphasis on analysis over description, on transnationalism over nationalism and interaction over action. That is why all these approaches failed to predict the end of the Cold War and its likely consequences for international relations. No theory, howsoever scientific it has been, can predict major upheavals and transformations in the global political system.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the Unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Pick the correct response about the core concern of Defensive realists.
 - a) Security
 - b) Power
 - c) Cooperation.
- 2) Pick the correct response. Neorealism has been faulted for its neglect of ?
 - a) Insights from history, sociology and philosophy
 - b) Systems approach
 - c) Models and theories of economics

2.2.5 Critical Theories and Globalisation (1991-2019)

With the end of the Cold War, not only the nature and working of international relations changed but new kind of discourse started in analysing and understanding of international politics. New Critical theories in the form of constructivism, feminism, post-modernism etc. started raising some normative questions, which were missing in the discourses that prevailed during the Cold War era. This theoretical orientation is termed as “Paradigm shift” in International Relations. This period is different from ‘post-Westphalia’ representing ‘post sovereignty’ phase. These theories were not concerned with scientism or analytical framework; rather they are of problem-solving nature. Hence, they can be termed as emancipatory theories. Therefore, they are aimed at providing an answer to questions faced by contemporary International Relations. As a result, these are purposive in nature and provide a critique of dogmatism. Simultaneously, they are in favour of de-legitimization of the existing order. Hence, their dominant concern is not merely providing a framework, but concerns for social and political examination. These normative and explanatory theories are developed by scholars’ like Andrew Linklater, Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Elshtain, Cynthia Enloe, Christine Sylvester, J. Ann Tinker, Richard Ashley, Richard Cox, Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas etc.

Some scholars believe that the behaviour of human beings is determined by their identity, which itself is shaped by society’s values, history and practice. Therefore, most of the institutions, including the state are socially constructed. For instance, feminists believe that gender-based role differentiation is socially rather than biologically determined. Similarly, critical theorists believe that the task of theory is not to just explain but provide for the emancipation of human beings from social institutions and practices that oppose them. In the same way, post-modernists consider themselves as incredulity towards meta-narratives. Postmodernism then is essentially concerned with de-constructing and de-trusting any account of human life that claims to have direct access to truth. It is a narrative of narratives that have a totalizing view of historical events, social experiences and culture as lived and politics as experienced. Meta narratives are false; they often claim to be all-knowing truths. Thus, in this era, like the earlier period, a lot of theories are available but they have their limitations like earlier ones. In sum, International Relations is a very complex discipline involving a variety of factors and forces shaping its working; and all attempts at building theories about IR have at best met only limited and partial success.

Parallel to political development in the form of the end of the Cold War, the world witnessed a new phenomenon of ‘Globalisation’ after 1991. But how to interpret and understand this phenomenon is also a cumbersome task. It is because both positive and negative discussion of this phenomenon is given in terms of its being a myth and reality. It is only after knowing both the arguments we can be better equipped to explain the working and process of contemporary international relations.

Those who support or justify the process of Globalisation give the following arguments in support of their contention. First, the world economy has become more interdependent than before; hence it has opened the doors of trade and other such activities for the nations. Second, as a result of this changing world has become more inter-connected and communicative, this has strengthened social

cohesiveness. Third, with the growth of large-scale interactions now the world is witnessing common culture across nations. Fourth, with this development differences among nations are being replaced by homogeneousness. Fifth, time and space have seemed to collapse and we are witnessing concept of the global village. Sixth, even polity seems to be moving in the direction of a transnational order and the beginning of a transfer of allegiance is witnessed from state to sub-state, transnational and international bodies. Seventh, a cosmopolitan culture is developing and people seem to begin to think globally and act locally. Finally, risk culture is emerging to take care of common humanitarian concerns.

But opposition to Globalisation is equally strong and the following arguments are given to prove their contention. First, the present process of Globalisation is merely strengthening capitalism. Therefore, it is more about Trade, FDI, Finances etc. than development of human growth and interactions. Second, it is very uneven in its effects, because it is a game between unequal players. Hence, it is not going to provide equal opportunities for all. Third, it is not Globalisation with a human face, rather it is the concentration of capital and going to prove the latest stage of Western imperialism. Fourth, it is going to benefit the rich and to remain disadvantageous for the poor. In this open competition, the huge gap between rich and poor countries will only widen and deepen further. Fifth, all forces of Globalisation are not good. For instance, it also makes it easier for the drug cartels and terrorists to operate worldwide. Sixth, it is not to facilitate good global governance, because most of the MNCs and TNCs are not under the control of any one country or some global agency. Finally, it is paradox: whether Globalization is a triumph of Western capitalism or it marks the rise of Asian economic and technological dynamism.

Thus, developments of Critical theories and Globalisation present a paradox for the readers to provide an adequate explanation for the contemporary International Relations. If critical theories are discussing the emancipations, then Globalisation is posing the problem of inegalitarian world order. In both the senses it is difficult to develop a general theory for the understanding of IR. Both the propositions must deal with multiple factors and processes; hence are not able to explain the complexities of contemporary international relations. No common consensus has been arrived at among different scholars. Thus, this era is also full of partial approaches that can at most explain one or the other phenomenon, but a complete understanding of international relations is missing.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the Unit for tips for your answer.

1) What is the function of a theory according to Critical theorists?

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2.3 LET US SUM UP

Above discussion about various stages of the evolution of International Relations reveals that this discipline is not only difficult but also very dynamic and complex to understand. In the first phase, it emerges as a separate discipline woven around the concept of nation-states as first developed under the Westphalian treaty. Treaty of Utrecht further polished it to provide complete external sovereignty to the nation-states. However, this phenomenon remained limited to diplomatic history and of the descriptive nature of the subject. Later, the period between the two world wars proved critical for the development of the subject. During this period, on the one hand, emphasis on current affairs was manifest; whereas, on the other hand, the importance of law and organisation was strongly underlined. It was believed that legal and institutional architecture shall help resolve the problems of war and peace among nations. In the post-Second World War era, major stress was put on scientism and studies based on Realistic paradigm. Finally, the end of the Cold War presented a bizarre scenario both at political and economic levels. As a result, alternative Critical theories of global politics were presented. But new departure has also not been able to develop a complete general theory of international relations. Simultaneously, post-1991 economic development in the form of Globalisation too cannot provide an answer to all kinds of problems and economic challenges being witnessed by most of the states. Thus, for a sound understanding of International Relations, some more efforts are needed. However, due to the dynamic and complex interdependence among nation-states, it seems difficult, if not impossible, to provide a complete explanation and understanding of International Relations in times to come.

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2.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) The study of IR was dominated by diplomatic histories which were mostly descriptive and chronological. These studies did not focus on contemporary developments and lacked scientific rigor. They lacked scientific rigor and did not establish causal relations

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) During the interwar years, the focus of IR shifted on institutions and on contemporary developments. In the absence of historical analysis, theory-building could not take place.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) (a)
- 2) (a)

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) A theory should function to emancipate human beings from social institutions and practices that oppress them.