

APPROACHES TO  
THE STUDY OF  
INTERNATIONAL  
POLITICS

# SYLLABUS

## **Core Course X - POL5 BO4 - Introduction to International Politics**

This paper aims to equip students with the basic intellectual tools for understanding International Relations. It introduces some of the most important theoretical approaches in international relations. The Course also contains different concepts in International Relations such as power diplomacy and foreign policy.

### **Module I: Perspectives on the study of International Politics:**

- a) Meaning, nature, scope and importance of International Politics.
- b) Approaches to the study of International Politics: Idealism, Realism and Neo-Realism, Neoliberalism  
Systems theory, Game theory, Decision Making theory.

### **Module II Emergence of the International State System**

- a) Westphalian system,
- b) Imperialism and Colonialism
- c) Cold War

### **Module III: Power and Mechanisms in Inter State Relations**

- a) Power, National Power, Elements of National Power
- b) Balance of Power: Meaning, devices and contemporary relevance
- c) Collective Security: Meaning and safeguards
- d) Pacific settlement of International disputes: Devices under UN charter
- e) International Law: nature, limitations and contemporary relevance.

### **Module IV: Diplomacy:**

Functions, types and limitations of Diplomacy. Diplomacy in the post-Cold war period

### **Module V: Foreign Policy**

- a) Meaning and Determinants of Foreign Policy

## Introduction

- The scope of International Politics expanded over the years and scholars have tried to develop certain theories of International Politics.
- Till recent time, scholars conceived IR as a generalized picture of the international scene and did not try to build up any theories to explain the behaviour on the international scene.
- After the emergence of behavioural sciences, scholars have made their effort to build up theories of IP and the scope of the subject undergone great changes.

The scholars, instead of giving a historical narrative of the world events, preferred to discuss the events with a view to theorize it.

## What is an approach?

- Scholars have adopted different approaches for the study of International Relations

According to Vernon Van Dyke, an approach “consists of a criteria of selection- Criteria involved in selecting the problems or questions to consider and in selecting the data to bring to bear; it consists of standards governing the inclusion and exclusion of questions and data.”

- It implies looking at the problem from a particular angle and explaining the phenomenon from the same angle.
- As different scholars have adopted different criteria for selecting problems and adopted different stand points, this has resulted in different approaches for the study of IR.

# **IDEALIST APPROACH**

## Introduction

- After the World War 1 international relations was introduced as an academic discipline.
- The earliest theoretical approach adopted was the idealist approach.
- As an organized discipline IR has generated enormous literature since the First World War.
- It is necessary to periodically review IR as an organized academic discipline.
- Idealism therefore finds place both in classical or traditional and contemporary theories.
- The idealist approach to theorizing derives from philosophy, ethics, history and law.
- As its major concern is with international organization or institutions and with international law, it is also named as legal-international approach.

## Introduction

- Classical idealism as a political theory is traced to Plato.

- Idealist approach laid great emphasis on norms, values and thus gave a normative dimension to international politics.
- Modern Idealism emerged in the eighteenth century and is regarded as the major source of inspiration behind the American and French revolutions.
- The world ravaged by the two world wars with millions being killed witnessed efforts on the part of some thinkers to conceive and design a world that would be based on cooperation, mutual understanding, trust, fellow feeling and nonviolence.

It would be certainly an idealistic reconstruction and portrayal of a world different from an anarchical international system likened to Hobbesian state of nature where all the nations were constantly in a state of war guided by their narrow selfish interests and impulses of egoism of power.

## Exponents and Theoreticians

### REPRESENTATIVE CLASSICAL IDEALISTS

- Idealism belongs both to classical and contemporary theories.
- Major Representatives of classical idealism are Kant, J. A. Hobson, Norman Angell, Woodrow Wilson and Russell.
- Hobson while criticizing modern imperialism gave an interesting plan for what could be called anarchic peace through social democracy.
- He recommends policies and reforms. He believed that genuine nationalism produces cosmopolitan internationalism.



# Exponents and Theoreticians

## Representatives of Contemporary Idealists

- Among the representatives of contemporary idealists are Richard Rosecrance, Robert O. Keohane, Charles E. Osgood and Richard A. Falk.
- Rosecrance is in favor of peace through free trade because he anticipates an anarchic world in which trading nations are on the upswing.
- Keohane is a theorist of international regimes.
- He explains that after the decline of American hegemony regimes develop a measure of autonomy and help to stabilize the international system.
- Like Rosecrance, Keohane maintains that path to peaceful order goes through a decentralized world.
- Osgood is a proponent of unilateralism, for reversing escalation by unilaterally induced tension reduction and by initiating a veritable spiral of peace.

# IDEALIST APPROACH

## Assumptions

According to Kelley, Jr. and Wittkopf , idealists projected a world view usually resting upon the following axioms:

- I. Human nature is essentially ‘good’ and capable of altruism, mutual aid and collaboration.
- II. The fundamental instinct of the humans for the welfare of the others makes progress possible;
- III. Bad human behavior is the product not of evil people but of evil institutions and structural arrangements that create incentives for people to act selfishly and harm others including making war;

# IDEALIST APPROACH

## Assumptions

- II. Wars represent the worst feature of the International system;
- III. War is not Inevitable and can be eliminated by doing-away with the Institutional arrangements that encourage it.
- VI. War is an international problem that requires global rather than national efforts to eliminate it and therefore,
- VII. International society has to reorganize itself to eliminate the institutions that make war likely;
- VIII. Idealism reposes faith in reason , international peace and order as a natural condition among progressive people tied by mutually shared political , economic and other interdependent interests in a shrinking ‘self-integrating world.

# IDEALIST APPROACH

## Explanations

The idealists offer the following explanations and remedies for solving international problems and for reforming international anarchy:

- a) States are main actors and units of analysis in the mainstream international organizational aspects of this approach. Progressive reform of the operations of the foreign state system is possible through its institutional/legal reorganization.
- b) Moral nations should act according to moral principles in their international behavior, avoid all kinds of traditional power politics, and follow policies of non-partisanship.

# IDEALIST APPROACH

## Explanations

- c) Attempts should be made to create supranational institutions to replace the competitive and war-prone system of territorial states. Setting up of the League of Nations and the U.N.O and an insistence on international Cooperation in social matters as approaches to peace were symptomatic of idealists institutional solutions to the Problem of war.
- d) The Legal control of war was also suggested. It called for new transnational norms to check the initiation of war and, should it occur, its destructiveness.
- e) The international institutional/legal restraints on conventional nation-state diplomacy, state-craft, balance of power and warfare through Collective Security, Pacific settlement, multilateral conference diplomacy, and the mobilization of institutionalized international public opinion, etc

# IDEALIST APPROACH

## Explanations

- f) Another way suggested by idealists was to eliminate weapons. The attempts towards global disarmament and arms control were symbolic of this path to peace in the days of idealism.
- g) The efforts should be made to see that the totalitarian forces cease to exist, as the idealist's believe that the struggles so far have been between democratic and totalitarian states. Totalitarian regimes have been the main causes of war in the world. Their elimination would pave the way for peace and harmony in the world

# Liberalism

- Liberalism is another major theoretical tradition generally in Political and economic world which raises consistent criticism against the realist political thought in International Politics.
- The roots of liberalism could be traced back to the idealism. This branch of political theory considers human beings as rational beings and believes in their moral goodness.
- Liberalism has more concern about individual human beings instead of state units.
- Classical liberal tradition goes back to Immanuel Kant, J.S. Mill, Richard Cobden, Woodrow Wilson, Joseph Schumpeter, J. M. Keynes, etc.
- Liberalism is viewed by realists as “normative ideals of peace and co-operation, which they label “idealist”, “legalist”, “reductionist” or “utopian”.” Sometimes, even the proponents of it argue that this theory is more normative than explanatory.

# Liberalism

- ❑ The scholars of liberalism stand for international connectivity through trade and other activities, believe in international organizations like UNO and also promotes the Democratic Peace Theory which argues that there is least possibility for a democratic state to enter into war.
- ❑ Unrestrained power will curtail individual liberty and freedom. The establishment of institutions and norms, both at domestic and international realm will do away with it.
- ❑ States' unrestrained power could be limited through such organizations and can promote co-operation each other.
- ❑ The increasing co-operation among states through cultural and economic exchanges will reduce conflict among them.



# Liberalism

- ❑ Liberals believe in internationalism and also hold that co-operation and trust could be developed in the international system.
- ❑ Liberals argue that in order to attain peace and order among the competing sovereign states, a regulatory mechanism like international organization is inevitable. This view is later popularized as liberal institutionalism.
- ❑ Liberal institutionalism could be traced to the ideals of Woodrow Wilson. According to the former US President Woodrow Wilson, the establishment of international organization will transform the 'jungle' of international politics into a 'zoo'.
- ❑ Thus liberals give more importance to the collective security than that of national security.
- ❑ Here the theory argues that the world order is stabilized not by the Balance of Power, but by the international regimes and international law.

# Neo-Liberalism

- Liberal institutionalism is associated more with that of the neo-liberal thought.
- Neoliberal thought is flourished in international politics not so long back.
- The neoliberal institutionalism has been given a new phase with the development of the theory of Complex Interdependence by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in the later 1970's.
- Criticizing the theory of realism and neorealism, Keohane and Nye argue that the role of the state is not confined merely to the security aspects.
- In the complex interdependent world of international politics, states are having varying goals which will be determined based on the demands of the time.
- There are multiple factors, internal and external, which affect the goal setting of each state.
- It highlights the dominant role of international and transnational organization and also promotes globalization.
- Co-operation is an essential feature of international politics.
- There are multiple channels connecting the world together such as the non-governmental elites, multinational firms, Banks, etc. In one way or the other, these channels connects the policies of states each other

# Neo-Liberalism

- ❖ According to neo-liberals, realists consider only the extreme competition among states and they disregarded the increasing “economic interdependence and the evolution of a transnational global society.”
- ❖ Another cardinal principle is that, like high politics (national security, military strength), low politics (social, economic and environmental issues) is also gaining supreme position in international politics.
- ❖ The theory of complex interdependence is a synthesis of power politics and liberal perspective.
- ❖ The point is that in the globalized world, the role of military is declined as a key security tool.
- ❖ If there is any chance, it may be used as a bargaining tool, nothing more.
- ❖ The growing ecological interdependence will erase the state borders and ‘humanity’ will be taken into consideration.

# Neo-Liberalism

- ❖ Joseph s. Nye delineates three major dimensions of changes in the practice of international politics- changes in actors, changes in goals and changes in instruments.
- ❖ When ‘realism’ was born, states were the only predominant actor in international politics that also was one by fourth in number compared to that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- ❖ Now there are wide range of actors like TNC’s (some of which are identified to have GDP more than of half of the states), inter-governmental organizations like UNO, EU, Arab League, etc, and also international NGO’s like Red Cross and Amnesty International.
- ❖ Also there are trans-national ethnic groups like Kurds, Pashtuns, etc, terrorist organizations and drug traffickers diffused beyond a specified border.

# Neo-Liberalism

- Along with the drastic changes in the nature of actors, there is a deviation from the traditionally set goal of military dominance to the other dimensions of security in the new era that is from economic, ecological and political security to the safety from pandemics, terrorism, resource scarcity, global warming, etc.
- Emerging threats are not from the traditional interstate wars, but from the product of globalization known as ‘new wars’ mainly fought by non state actors that too by using new tactics.
- In such wars non-combatants are targeted easily. Unconstrained, individual centric security agenda can only secure the international security. “State... was still seen as the most effective guarantor of this security.”
- Precisely, there is a transition from security of states to the security of human beings.