

Neo realism and the european union essay

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Neo realism and the european union Introduction The emergence of the European Union (EU) and further more its securitization as manifested by the conduct of active operations undertaken by some of the EU countries under the International Security Administration Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan challenges the tenets of international relations theory based on neo realism in many ways. The creation of the European Union as a conglomeration of states many of whom have subordinated their own interests to that of the regional community is difficult to comprehend given the basis of neo realism that securitization in states is caused by anarchy or lack of order within a system. Neo realism's basic premise that in any given inter state environment lack of authority to regulate results in disorder leading to greater securitization thus needs to be debated.

(Schroeder, 1994). Seen that states operate on an innate inclination for preservation of self interest, the EU model is unique. In it is seen a system, in which states are not self oriented, though they may have to an extent recognized that their self interest is driven by being within the common forum provided by the Union. States thus no longer see each other as enemies or potential enemies within the EU. (Booth, 1991). As a regional bloc too EU is not seeking to identify enemies outside.

Thus lack of trust and consequent fear does not seem to pose a security dilemma to states within the EU and the politics of self interest are relatively muted. On the other hand when viewed from the context of adjustments made in the structure of the state system, neo realism's precepts may be more applicable to EU. The rationality paradigm of neo

realism when applied to EU states perhaps indicates that survival is better ensured by being together than being apart.

(Schroeder, 1994). Thus the EU is seen to maximize benefits that states seek for themselves and minimize losses by attaining a defensive neo realism paradigm. Applying the theory of neo realism to the EU thus seems to pose a paradox which needs to be examined in its entirety. This understanding would have to relate to identifying the basic premise of neo realism, examining its relevance in the context of EU, visualize its applications which can provide a context and compare it with other theories in international relations. Examining Neo realism Neo realism is an off shoot of realism. However it has very distinctive differences from its antecedent. The theory developed by Kenneth Waltz presupposes that states operate within an anarchical system thus any balancing that they do within this system is designed to enhance survival rather than to exercise power.

(Waltz, 1979). Realism on the other hand indicates that states have power which they exercise, this being the key difference with Neo Realism. The most powerful states within the system are said to be the key drivers.

(Waltz, 1986). These are referred to as the poles of the system and from the dominance of one or more poles within the system; the structure is known as unipolar, bipolar or multipolar. Neo realism has been classically explained through the three, " images" of Waltz. These images are also in the nature of hypotheses. In the first hypothesis, Waltz or neo realists in

general tend to question the premise set by the realists led by Morgenthau, that human nature is the cause of war. (Schroeder, 1994).

Realists propose that human nature is evil, which reflects on the nature of states. States thus indulge in conflicts resulting in wars which are perpetuated to restore the balance of power. This is the position which realists take in international politics to explain perpetuity of conflict. (Waltz, 1979). The Neo realists on the other hand argue that if this is the case, then it should be possible to apply international political thought internationally in all settings and situations. It should also be possible that solutions which are practicable domestically can be applied to international polity and vice versa.

However empirically it is seen that this is not quite possible or true. (Waltz, 1979). The absence of a trend of any major dissent against international norms also weakens the theory of realism.

(Booth, 1991). Thus neo realists contend that if international law is being obeyed by most of the states, most of the times, the position that since human nature is evil, it would create conflict may not hold true. This is also proper in the context of institutions as the United Nations which despite lacking the capability to coerce states are able to obtain their acquiescence most of the times. Thus it is implied by the Neo realists that conflict arising in international polity cannot be ascribed to the malevolence of human nature and needs to be seen in a different light. A second argument

proposed by neo realists as a corollary to the hypothesis above is that if it is

states which are the cause of wars and internal conditions that are obtained in states leads to conflict, then dissimilar states should cause wars, while similarly profiled or good states should contribute to peace.

(Booth, 1991). Thus in case the World comprises only of democracies or socialist states, then conflict will be avoided. Neo realists believe that this cannot be proved empirically. The form that a state adopts is not believed to provide any indicating of its proclivities to conduct wars or live peacefully within or with its neighbors. Thus it is seen that capitalist states have gone to war with other capitalist states. (Waltz, 1979).

Within the EU for example, England and Germany were at war with each other for long periods in their history. The final hypothesis posited by neo realists is that causes of war could be derived from conditions obtained in the international system. Thus as seen in the second image, as domestic conditions dictated the possibility of wars, it is the nature of the international system which dictates the reasons for occurrence of conflicts. Human behavior can thus be better understood by studying the society in which a person has grown. Neo realists profess anarchy within the international system. (Schroeder, 1994). This anarchy is not chaos but it is the absence of order, of a hierarchical chain which would dictate the manner in which conflicts can be regulated after signs of occurrence or development are noticed. To regulate order, while realists rely on balance of power, wherein states regulate order by maintain balance either through force or compromise, Waltz does not accept this to be inevitable.

(Waltz, 1986). He indicates that states will employ force in case they deem it is to their advantage while indulge in peace where it suits them. Neo realists believe that the realist paradigm has two basic problems. The first is the possibility of accidents due to wrong appreciation of each others powers by states. This combined with a lack of any central authority to exercise control or regulate the growth of state power is felt to increase the possibility of wars between two states. The primary need for a state to preserve itself without depending on others implies that states tend to view each facet of power as related to their own survival or security. (Waltz, 1979).

To provide for their own security, states build up their forces, which in turn results in creation of anxiety amongst their closest competitors. This in turn leads to development of coercive power by these threatened states. In such cases where the conditions for a trip wire to upset the balance is created the possibility of wars between states increases to a great degree.

The conflict between Neo realism as propounded by Waltz and other theories of international relations is that neo realists question other theories because these cannot be fully tested or evaluated. Any theory which does not stand the test as per Waltz cannot be called as a theory. (Waltz, 1979). Therefore it is proposed by Neo Realists that the entire system should be examined rather than just one or more units within it. Since the system comprises of a number of units and units are organized into structures, Waltz attempts to indicate the importance of structures that affect the interactions between systems and how these interactions influence the structure in turn. Thus causes can be located within the state and not really human nature.

Survival is said to be the key driver which is based on self interest. (Booth, 1991). Thus states are driven to compare themselves with their peers and then seem to evolve modes to survive.

The natural order of things indicates that states strive to emulate those who have been more successful than them, at the same time assiduously cultivating their own independence. (Waltz, 1979). In this process, ideology, history, culture and institutions do not bear much meaning.

Structure is taken as a model in neo realism to explain state behavior. (Wendt, 1987). It is said to provide a state options, capabilities and limitations to operate within and outside the system. (Booth, 1991). Once the structure of a state is understood along with the impact that it is likely to cause, it would be feasible to explain as well as predicate their behavior. The availability of greater power with some states provides them more options, while weak states have limited options. There is thus a need for ensuring that power within a state is optimal, it cannot be too much nor it can be too less.

If it is too much it can create a feeling of vulnerability in other states leading to an effort to match their own power with it and possible conflict. Too less power is equally dangerous as per Waltz and can lead to the very destruction of the state.

Polarity of structures is another premise of neo realists which indicates that in a structure only a few states matter. (Wendt, 1987).

The order was multipolar before World War II and bi polar till the end of the Cold War but now is seen to be unipolar. Technology is said to be an

important facet of neo realism theory. It needs to be thus interpreted with a modernist outlook in international relations, for pre dominance of technology is a recent phenomenon of the post industrial information age.

(Booth, 1991). Its relevance in structural theory cannot be undermined.

Technology is said to provide the power to society by developing its material and spiritual resources.

Military technology is particularly relevant and those states which are at the fore front of technology acquisition are said to enjoy a major advantage in this sphere. Technology plays an important role in neo realism theory. It is seen to assume importance in any theory of international relations, but especially so in a structural premise. States develop power and capability by extracting from their society and economy material and spiritual resources which are converting into power. (Waltz, 1986).

Development of technology, military in particular is a consequence of the ability to extract the same from the economy and society. Those states best able to do it can develop greater capabilities. The United States and the Soviet Union were the only two states capable of extracting enough resources to create a second strike nuclear capability during the Cold war thus creating bipolarity. Application in International Relations – The EU

The application of Neo Realism in international relations has been developing. It is a theory of post modern international relations. This system indicates conflicts and war are not a product of human nature; it is a result of the international system which drives individuals and states to be selfish.

Going by this paradigm, it would be evident that the EU nation states are operating within the system which decrees that it is in the interest of the states to operate in a cooperative rather than a confrontational manner. The premise of neo realism that it is survival which dictates the ultimate policy that states adopt seems to be reflected in the European Union, wherein Britain, France, Germany and other states of Western and Eastern Europe who were bitter enemies over the ages, based on a differentiated Anglo Saxon, French and Teutonic culture have come together within the structure of the European Union, providing sound basis for neo realist interpretation of international theory. The theory of optimal power can be very easily applied to the states of the European Union. (Waltz, 1979). Given the conditions obtained in Europe in the beginning of 21st Century, it is apparent that the power of each state has been optimized in varied fields to complement each other.

This complementarity has created a sense of security. However the moment this power balance is seen to be upset, which will be in the field of trade or common commoditization, signs of tension within the structure may arise. (Snyder, 1991). That a state can have too much power and thus make it harmful to others is also indicated by various studies including Paul Kennedy's seminal work on the rise and fall of great powers. It is the common interest of all states for survival which has led to the very formation of the European Union, a trend which is evident in neo realist theory. Here again the premise in the context of the EU needs some debate. If the

World is unipolar, then it would be natural to assume that American power should be able to regulate the course of events.

However despite the overwhelming superiority of US power in its many manifestations, it is evident that it has not succeeded in regulating the World. On the other hand abdication of regulation by the EU is a key issue. Lack of threats from the East, that is Russia and the West that is the United States has probably led to coagulation of interests of the states. (Waltz, 1986). The multi polarity within the EU as per neo realists would be dangerous as it would create unpredictability. However in practice it is seen that this has provided for greater stability and synergy thereby avoiding any conflict.

Thus instead of seeing every one as a threat, states are seeing each other as a possible partner for growth, providing for greater security. Similarly the possession of nuclear power by just two of its members has not created any asymmetrical feelings of anxiety amongst its other members, thus the explanation offered by neo realists appears some what incongruous in this context. (Waltz, 1986).

Perhaps disparity in military technology development and acquisition in EU countries demonstrates two issues which relate to the neo realist theory. Firstly, it is indicated that while there has been development of military technology in a large many fields, the strategic advantages obtained through nuclear technology remain unexploited. This has to an extent created vulnerabilities which were exploited during the Soviet era. But the provision

of a US umbrella prevented this disadvantage from becoming a security liability. Recommendations Though in purely theoretical terms Waltz has accepted in the past that states are not unwilling to subordinate their sovereignty so as to attain security, application of neo realism in the context of states and structures as the EU where despite the lack of a central authority which is controlling anarchy, there has been reasonable understanding between the states would necessitate that neo realists should review their theories to explain this phenomenon.

(Waltz, 1993). The inability to perceive such a happening and engagements by EU nations under one umbrella as in Afghanistan needs further analysis. A review of this facet will overcome the major deficiency perceived in Neo realism of its inability to provide a reasoned perspective on how security cooperation and international institutions can successfully regulate power. Another powerful component of neo realism as applicable to

the European Union seems to be the belief of its creator Waltz that international relations can change as opposed to the beliefs of the Realists as Morgenthau who relies on the confrontational nature of humans to indicate that it is a possible hurdle to the changing of international relations.

Comparison with Realism The emergence of the European Union in the realist theory is difficult to comprehend. In fact the proponents have been at a loss to explain how EU has emerged as a heterogeneous yet an independent entity. The only possible explanation would appear to be that states or units have become benign hence are willing to compromise their original values and principles. Neo realists on the other hand may attempt to

explain it as a process of stable anarchy in that the units being secure themselves, there is no perceived necessity for keeping stability within and hence are achieving the ends of unity.

(Booth, 1991). One plausible explanation could be that the self preservation instinct of the European states has probably resulted in their coming together. In terms of definition of power, it is perhaps the perception of the European states of their innate loss of power that has resulted in their union to seek the lost power which many of the states including France, Germany, the Netherlands and Great Britain had enjoyed from the 18th to the 20th Century.

Thus power is seen to shape the behavior towards benign ness. On the other hand by ignoring the role of human nature in shaping the polity in Europe which has led to establishment of the European Union, as indicated through a realist perspective, neo realism seems to be too focused on the structural approach. Presumably the theory being a broad American construct, its applicability and empirical observations could be from an American rather than a European continental perspective. The United States has not experienced conflict between states in Europe over the past two centuries and the urge of many leaders in Europe to come together has been dictated by the influence and acceptance of the need for and possibility of peace in Europe. Thus the influence of a benign human nature cannot be over ruled.

The other aspect of concern is the non acceptance of lasting peace as a possible outcome over the years. (Snyder, 1991). This has been rejected by neo realists but with the European continent now largely quiescent as compared to its turbulent history of conflict for many centuries; the neo realists would be hard put to explain the same. References1. Schroeder, Paul. 1994. Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory.

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