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Reconsideration of Theories in Foreign Policy

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This paper shall be a contribution in order to motivate research on the level of international relations. Firstly, I will consider the history of international politics and of international relations. Secondly, I will present the Neorealism which is a popular and often cited theory in international relations. Finally, criticism to the neorealist approach will be mentioned and it will be emphasized that it lacks renovation of theory in international relations. The paper consists of three parts:

- 1.) International Relations – long history and current reality
- 2.) Neorealism – exemplary theory to describe International Relations
- 3.) Criticism to Neorealist Approach – why Neorealism is not the right means to explain today's world

1.) International Relations – long history and current reality

International Relations is a field within political sciences which has been observed and discussed for many centuries since the antiquity and even longer ago. Nevertheless, the consideration of International Relations is only sensible from the Modern Age on. This age embodies the threshold to a new world order where different nations coexist and the church loses its hegemony. One of the most important events within this age is the Thirty Years War and the following Peace of Westphalia in 1648 which introduces first notions of European nations. Such a development is necessary for the theory of international relations as nations embody the object of observation in this context. Nevertheless, the promotion of international politics does not only occur due to the Peace of Westphalia but also due to important philosophical ideas which question reasons of state (like Niccolò Machiavelli), sovereignty, international law and fundamental rights (like Francisco de Vitoria) or due to further important historical events. Brief, it is the sum of different aspects that contributes to the question of international relations in early Europe.

Thomas Hobbes, 17th century pioneering philosopher of modern politics, cites the famous Roman quote “homo homini lupus” (man is a wolf to his fellow man)

within his framework to reason of state. This quote can be transferred to the early interpretation of international relations as they are considered in the Modern Age. Originally, Hobbes describes the natural condition of human beings which is influenced by mistrust towards other human beings. As soon as one human being utters interest in exchange with another human being, a contract is concluded which can guarantee both parties' interests. Transferring this theory to international relations, it can be derived that generally nations mistrust one another but can agree on a contract when they have certain interests.

In the course of history the idea of "homo homini lupus" is representative for political behaviour between nations. Contracts like the Peace of Westphalia (1648) or the Peace of Utrecht (1713) are based on mistrust or wars and, therefore, are concluded primarily to avoid another war situation which is relevant to all participating contract parties.

Over the centuries, philosophers and politicians have tried to explain international relations with various theories. Even if such theories differ from one another, they can be led back to common variables like the power of one nation, possible threat to other nations or the nation's state of war. The reason for this common ground is the fact that international wars are no rarity until the 1940s. Either a nation is preparing itself for warfare or it is about to proclaim the state of war. War is considered an appropriate political means to achieve national interests.

This conception is damaged fundamentally in the 1940s. On account of the cruel wars of the 20th century and to the installation of the United Nations Organization, warfare is regarded as last resort in international relations. After the horrible experiences of World War I and World War II the new arising world order introduces new definitions to international relations. It becomes their duty to maintain a dialogue between the cultures and to contribute to international understanding. Exchange that happens on cultural level becomes more important and economies start to link themselves to other economies as goods are exchanged and migration increases.

In the 20th century linking between economies lead to the phenomenon of globalization. Within this phenomenon new conflicts spark off which are not anymore considered as international wars. These conflicts happen on an economic level and

sharpen on a fierce competition in economy and military strength but never escalate in a war. Consequently, the idea of “homo homini lupus” goes through a change in application, as nations are not warring with one another. In the 20th century conflicts are carried out on economical levels. Therefore, conclusion of contracts does not seek peace declarations as in the Modern Age but instead of it promotes economic interest to contracting parties. Furthermore, nations have to face new situations within their borders which arise due to migration, inflation and economic fluctuation. Great achievements in technology accelerate the globalization that transforms the world to a “global village”. Once again, international relations must be redefined in the 20th century. On the one hand, international policy is meant to intervene in international matters, on the other hand national borders literally melt away due to globalization and migration. New theories on international relations and international politics are drawn up. One theory is the so called Neorealism which is founded in 1979 and considered as appropriate theory of international politics. The Neorealism will be described within the next part of this paper. Furthermore, the third part will analyze whether this theory is still valid for today’s society and utter criticism.

2.) Neorealism – exemplary theory to describe International Relations

Since the beginning of human civilization, scientists try to explain the world. Everything is being considered again and again until the matching paradigm is found. Revolutions, sudden changes and great intellectual, technical or scientific achievements may lead to an alteration in paradigm and therefore to new methods and theories. International Relations are just one of many different fields which follow this cycle. Amongst other theories, the neorealist theory is one of the representative approaches to the current paradigm in international relations. This section describes the most important assumptions and essential features to this theory.

The Neorealism is a theoretical pattern that describes international policies. It is invented by Kenneth Waltz in 1979. This approach uses the relative power of one nation as exogenous variable in order to describe this nation’s foreign policy, its power and defence policy which are considered as endogenous variables. The exogenous variable (relative power) is constraint by political, economical and military measures or resources that a nation can use in order to protect its sovereignty and

interests. Waltz implies in his theory the power definition as the sociologist Max Weber describes this expression: “power means to take every chance within a social relation in order to impose the personal will against somebody’s reluctance, no matter what this chance is based on.” The more “chances” a nation can use for protection of national interests, the bigger is its relative power compared to the international system. The neorealist theory specifies the correlation between cause and effect and can give advice and predictions to the nation’s policy makers.

As every other political theory, the Neorealism is based on certain assumptions. Firstly, the international system is considered as anarchic what implies that there is no international institution to impose sanctions or to guard fundamental rights. As a consequence, dispute settlement mechanisms do not exist and every nation has to defend itself in case of offence. Secondly, every nation is considered as rational protagonist and bases its decisions on a trade-off of costs and utility. Nations are constructed similarly and cannot be differentiated functionally which is described by the technical term “like units”. Moreover, every nation seeks to keep its power and to maintain a state of security towards other nations. Security and power are determined as the most important national achievements within the neorealist theory and can be strengthened by extending autonomy and influence, this means by pursuing power-generating policy. The neorealist approach defines the term security as safeguarding of national identity, interests and national borders. The security aim is achieved if one nation influences others by positive or negative obligations and if this nation itself is not influenced by others and therefore maintains its autonomy. Power within the Neorealism implies “control over resources” which can be political, economic or military as already mentioned above. The national endowment of resources is important to guarantee safety and can be measured by GDP, military expenses or troop strength. Finally, Neorealism assumes a constant threat for security as there is a slackness of control in the international system.

Due to these assumptions, nations are supposed to guard security as a consequence to the anarchical system. As already mentioned within the assumptions, security can be ensured when extending autonomy and influence. Since the neorealist approach considers a constant threat for security, nations have to face this situation on a long-term with an extension of power. According to the theory, increase in power in one nation is considered as a threat for another nation

which will respond also with an increase of power. This vicious circle constitutes a dilemma within Neorealism and leads to conflict situations that can degenerate into a war.

The theory of Neorealism is still today very meaningful within International Relations. Its explanatory model of foreign policy is often applied when considering international conflicts or security matters. Otherwise, Neorealism cannot deliver appropriate solutions to international challenges beyond war and defence. Criticism is uttered frequently because of its limited application field and its unrealistic assumptions. Therefore, this paper will continue with a critical analyze of Neorealism. It will be claimed that this theory is outdated in today's globalized society and the renovation of theory in international policy will be demanded.

3.) Criticism to Neorealistic Approach – why Neorealism is not the right means to explain today's world

The 21st century is determined by the headword globalization and the changes and challenges it brings along to policy makers. As already mentioned in the first part, national affiliation loses its importance and national borders melt away. Modern societies are considered to be international societies in which different cultures are represented. Peaceful coexistence of people with different origins living in one neighbourhood is no rarity anymore. Nevertheless, new challenges arise within intercultural dialogue and communication. Diplomacy has to find the balance in representing one culture without imposing its traditions on other cultures, international policy faces problems when developing foreign aid concepts and the gulf between developed and developing countries grows. With the help of political theories explanation and advice on the 21st century problems can be given.

However, considering the explanatory model of neorealist theory, one can hardly find a starting point to explain current issues. The reason for this problem is the outdated approach of Neorealism. Even if political scientists use this theory even nowadays, it has to be considered that its assumption cannot explain today's world. Firstly, the assumption of anarchy within international system is not true. International institutions and international law are safeguarding a balance within the world so that no nation has to fear a threat coming up from another nation. History has shown that

nations are willing to obey to one international system like the United Nations Organization and therefore to renounce autonomy in order to support international relations. Secondly, as international trade is essential to a stable economy, no nation in today's society will abstain from importing and exporting goods. This means that nations exert influence on each other and fall under each other's influence voluntarily in order to have economic advantage. Autonomy and influence as important means of Neorealism are not as relevant as political means in actual policy.

Moreover, power and security cannot be considered as the highest political aim for all nations. Even if security is a fundamental aspect, it is the security against national threats and not the security against international threats that is challenged more often. The aspect of power in Neorealism is defined by political, economic and military means which imply that there is a permanent rivalry and competitive thinking between the nations. In fact, this is not the case as every nation focuses on its own strong points and specialises in sectors where it seeks the most advantages. This specialisation is advantageous for all nations and their cooperation.

Furthermore, the Neorealist approach does not take into consideration the influence of international non-governmental protagonists like non-governmental organizations, international companies or religious groups. It tries to explain International Relations and foreign policy by power and sovereignty and excludes completely other aspects of International Relations that are based on cultural exchange, cultural heritage and cultural comprehension.

Even if the Neorealist theory is founded in 1979, more than 30 years after World War II, it is laid out for a world that lives in fear and recommends to strengthen national power in order to prepare to potential warfare. This theoretical approach is an insult towards efforts in international diplomacy. Neorealism does not mention diplomacy or cultural dialogue as a peaceful means to face threats in an anarchical system. Today it is well-known that in a globalized world, diplomacy and cultural comprehension are the best means for international policy.

Therefore this paper demands that theories in international relations adapt to new phenomena such as the globalization. If the intention of political research is to give valid explanations and advice to policy makers, it is essential to control and update again and again the measures and the exogenous variables within the

existing paradigm. As world changes, flexibility is needed to catch new influences and define new protagonists for scientific purpose. Research can only maintain its status due to permanent adaptation and reaction on sudden changes. These reactions are needed now in order to describe further international developments and in order to contribute to a peaceful world order.