

System or Unit: Why do Dyadic Relations Differ?

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Introduction:

Most of the students of international relations are steeped in the debates on the concept of anarchy. Not only neorealist school builds its arguments on the assumption that the international system is anarchic and consequently states are compelled to conduct their foreign policies with respect to the anarchic nature of international system, but also neoliberalism and social constructivism acknowledge that presumption even though they draw different conclusions. However, those systemic approaches are challenged by individualist approaches. Therefore, the research question of this paper is how and why within different dyads we observe different relationships. One can explain the variation of actions of units by applying different levels of analysis. In this paper, I will argue that international system even if it is anarchic and self-help does not necessarily compel states to act as if they are living in a state of nature. Starting with these assumptions, I will argue that the dyadic relations can vary, if there is a hierarchic relationship between two states, if states calculate their relative gains differently, and if there are economical, institutional and normative links and similarities between them. The former two arguments are critiques of neorealism from a realist perspective and the latter argument has its roots in liberal thought. In this endeavor, after a brief review of the premises of neorealism, the paper will proceed with the question of how dyadic relations can differ with references to some specific examples.

I) The International System from a Neorealist perspective:

Prior to give arguments of neorealism about international system, it is better to touch upon the level of analysis and agent-structure debate in international relations theory. By reviewing of ongoing discussions I aim at shedding light on the nature of international relations as a field of social science and it will help identifying the different levels of analysis taken by different schools of international relations.

I.D) The level of analysis problem:

Since the end of the 1950s, some scholars studying on world politics have been trying to explain the international relations by applying more scientific and systemic approach. This new approach disregards the history and international law as well. The main aim of the scholars is to incorporate methods of natural science to the field of international relations. In this regard, the proponents of that approach have been trying to enunciate the principles of international relations in order to make generalizations and more accurate predictions. Moreover, the debate is not only about methodology, but it is a conflict between reductionism/individualism and systems/holistic approaches. Reductionism deals with parts and units and it concludes that individuals are responsible for the outcomes of certain events in the world politics, whereas holism takes system as a unit of analysis and thus it concludes that researchers should look at systemic effects to explain international relations. In that sense, it can be concluded that level of analysis relates to the agent-structure debate, which indicates that actually, it is an ontological problem (for a recent discussion, see: Wight 2006:102-120).

David Singer is one of the scholars who tried to apply scientific and systemic methods to international relation. In his well-known article, published in 1961, he dealt with the level of analysis problem. According to Singer, most of the researchers in this field neglect the influence of international system. Thus, he contended that international relations should be analyzed in two levels namely, the system level and the national level. His argument is more about methodology where the behavioralists confront traditionalists (for a detailed analysis see Schmidt 2006:10-15). In addition to Singer, Kenneth Waltz, in his two seminal books, tried to lay down the theoretical assumptions of a systemic theory. Waltz, in his first piece (1959), answered the question of “where the major causes of war are to be found” (p.12) by looking at three images i.e. human nature, structure of the states and the state system. Waltz (1979) further developed and clarified the principles of his systemic theory in the late 1970s. He tried to explain states behavior in an anarchic system and tried to identify the ways states can apply in that self-help world. Put differently, system is the independent variable and the state behavior is dependent variable. That kind of parsimonious approach aims at providing generalizations about state behaviors through the

basic characteristics of international system. Consequently, the level of analysis that Waltz employed is international system. For some scholars, Waltz's arguments are the result of a misinterpretation of reductionist/holist debate and the level of analysis problem (Buzan 1995:212; for a review of Waltz's book through a discussion on agents and structures, see: Wendt 1991 and Hollis and Smith 1991). By having skimmed the ongoing debates on the level of analysis problem, I have tried to emphasize that actions of units (states' behaviors) can be explained by different levels of analysis, which is discussed below in depth.

I.II) The features and consequences of international anarchy:

Thomas Hobbes described the conditions in which humans are living as a state of nature, which implies that no one is immune to the threat of others, even the strongest (Vasquez 1996:219). Therefore, he concluded that state of nature is a state of war which does not only consist an actual fighting but also a permanent threat to the individual due to the lack of a *leviathan* (ibid, p.220). In such circumstances, individuals have the right to defend themselves and eventually they become a potential threat to each other.

Waltz (1979), starting with Hobbes' arguments about human nature and society, reached a conclusion that the nature of international system is similar to the state of nature which is anarchic and self-help. For Waltz, that is the key to understanding the reasons behind war. According to neorealism, first of all, the system is anarchic because there is no world government. This assumption states that the international system is not like domestic politics in which every unit is obliged to behave in compliance with the rules imposed by an authority which has the legitimate use of force on others. In the international system there is no authority that exerts power on states to regulate interstate relations. States are the primary actors irrespective of the role of international organizations and law.

Second, all states are capable of using force against other states which implies that war is likely outcome of state relations at any time. For Waltz, not the use of force but the high possibility of resorting to force is the main characteristic that prevents system from a chaos (Waltz 1959 cited in Wagner 2007:24). The pervasive phenomenon in international politics is not the occurrence of war but it is the security competition among states (Hyde-Price

2007:30, 32). As Waltz (2000) argued in a recent paper, states can go to war, because of the shadow of future which implies the inevitability of war (p.40-41).

In accordance with these assumptions, neorealism posits its third argument. All states, regardless of their domestic structure, have same interest, namely survival through security maximization. These same interests are not only the result of international anarchy but also the consequences of rational choices made by every actor. If every state behaves rationally, they will seek to maximize their security (Hyde-Price, p.33). Security maximization in an anarchic system can be achieved by increasing the capabilities and power in the expense of others'. In this lies the concept of security dilemma which means that "in its efforts to preserve or enhance its own security, one state can take measures that decrease the security of other states and cause them to take countermeasures that neutralize the actions of the first state and that may even menace it" (Art and Jervis 2007:2). Thus, the main difference between states relates to the distribution of capabilities, which causes states to attribute more importance to relative gains rather than absolute gains when they decide to cooperate. For this reason, cooperation between states is rare and temporary in international anarchy.

II) Dyadic Relations: Hierarchy, Relative Gains and Liberal Peace

In the preceding section, I have discussed the features and consequences of international system from a top-down perspective. However, the realm of IR theory abounds with criticisms of neorealism through different perspectives. On the one hand, neorealism has been criticized for its pessimist nature by a group of scholars who challenge neorealism by contending that cooperation can be possible under anarchy if institutions provide more precise information and prevent cheating, if states' major concerns shift from security to economical ones, and if states form a world order based on the emergence of international society (Keohane 1998; Keohane and Nye 1989, Bull 2002). On the other hand, some other studies have questioned the nature of anarchy and have drawn an argument that 'anarchy is what states make of it', which indicates that change in international system is possible if the states construct their relations on a collective identity (Wendt 1992). However, these different criticisms deal with the same level, international system. In this section, I will try

to answer the question of why there is a variation in international relations with respect to dyadic relations.

II.I) Hierarchy and Authority:

Some researchers contend that even though the international system is anarchic one can find a hierarchy between different sets of states. These scholars try to explain that why some states relations are based on hierarchy which means that one actor exerts an authority on the other one.

David Lake (2007) defines hierarchy as “a dyadic relationship between two polities that varies across pairs within any system from complete anarchy to full dominance” (p.57 footnote 27). In addition to this dyadic nature of hierarchy between different states, Lake puts forth that instead of coercive capabilities authority shapes the hierarchy between two states (ibid. p.57 footnote 27). In his model, states have a relational authority which is divided into two different hierarchies, namely economic hierarchy and security hierarchy between two states. According to him, dyadic relations move within a spectrum of different kind of hierarchies. With regard to the security dimension, states relationships can be at one point between a diplomatic correspondence and a protectorate. As for economic hierarchy, relationships in dyads can vary from market exchange to dependency (ibid, p.59).

In order to test his assumption that hierarchic relationships exist in international politics, Lake measures security hierarchy by taking deployment of troops of dominant state on the territory of subordinate state (ibid, p.62) and number of alliances that subordinate state form with other countries apart from dominant state (ibid, p.63). The first assumption is that if the number of troops deployed increases, the relationship between two states moves towards anarchy to hierarchy. Second, if the number of independent alliances is high, the dyadic relationship is at a point close to anarchy. On the other hand, Lake measures economic hierarchy by looking at exchange rate regime and trade dependence of states in a dyad (ibid, p.64-67). According to his model, higher trade/GDP ratio indicates higher hierarchic relations, as well as the use of same currency does. From his empirical analysis he draws a conclusion that there is a significant hierarchy between Canada and the USA

since Canada is economically and militarily subordinated to the US in 1995. Moreover, there is a security hierarchy between Germany and the USA as well as between Japan and the USA. These findings support the idea that different degrees of hierarchy can possibly exist in dyadic relationships.

II.II) Relative gains in dyadic relations:

Some scholars by reformulating the game theory have drawn a conclusion that states can achieve cooperation if the interactions iterated (Axelrod 1984, cited in Werner 1997:290). For instance, Oye (1986) puts forward that ‘the length of the shadow of future’, ‘the payoff structure’ and ‘the number of states’ affect the cooperation between states (cited in Werner 1997:290). In addition to these arguments, some other scholars have provided different inferences by reformulating relative gains calculations in dyadic relations. This section is devoted to elaborate on this kind of argument.

Werner (1997) tries to reinterpret the neorealist assumption that relative gains matters in any case. According to Werner, there can be different calculations of relative gains in dyadic relations. She raised two flaws of neorealist inferences which argues that states form bilateral relations with regard to their position in the system (ibid, p.292). The first argument is that states calculate their overall security irrespective of their losses or gains in dyadic relations (ibid, p.293). In this regard, states take their future gains as well as their gains against third parties into account when they decide to cooperate. This assumption is based on the presumption that states can be either opponent or ally on a case by case basis. Werner makes an assortment that even though the system is anarchic, a state can assume that its opponent can be an ally in a different case. In this regard, if the states are not steadfast foes, probability of cooperation increases (ibid, p.294). This is because “a state will expect greater marginal effects from its own gains rather than from the other’s if its gains can advance its interests in other relationships” (ibid, p.301). However, the author also acknowledges the limitations of her arguments and she concludes that even though states agree on cooperation the cooperation cannot be realized due to the disagreement on how to cooperate (ibid, p.301).

To support Werner's arguments, due to the scope of this paper, I just want to highlight Turkey-Iran relations as an example of different relative gains calculations. Even if Iran is a threat to Turkey, Turkish politicians back the UN resolutions about Iranian nuclear developments. On the other hand, Turkey maintains her economic relations with Iran so that she does not run out of natural gas and besides she wants to enhance her geopolitical importance in the eyes of the European states. Least but not least, since the Turkish politicians think that Iran can support Turkish policy about Iraq especially concerning the northern Iraq, the benefits of maintaining relations with Iran even though she is willing to have nuclear weapons is important for Turkey.

II.III) Liberal peace:

Applying Immanuel Kant's ideas on relations among republican states to international relations, some scholars have drawn a conclusion that in democratic dyads conflict is less likely and rare (Doyle 1986; Russett 1993; Russett and Oneal 2001). Kant, in search of 'perpetual peace' in world politics, argued that peace can be realized, if republican states prevail over authoritarian ones; if economical relations enhance among states and lastly if international institutions and norms regulates international politics (Russett and Oneal 2001:35-42). In this section, I focus on two dimensions of Kantian peace namely, economic interdependence and democratic peace since this paper is dealing with dyadic relations.

According to the liberal thinkers, economic interdependence between two states will make them refrain from declaring war¹. Norman Angell (1933[1908]), in the early of 20th century, contended that economic relations would make wars irrational and unlikely, because the gains from trade is higher than the gains from war(cited in McMillan 1997:37). Second, economic relations enhance the social and political interactions, which results in 'we-feeling' between states (Deutsch et.al 1957 cited in Russett and Oneal 2001:130). Higher trade gains and increase in states' interactions lower the probability of conflict

¹ In addition to dyadic relations recent studies have argued that trade can inhibit war if the states are more connected to the world economic system. (see: Gartzke, Erik, and Quan Li. 2003. "War, Peace, and the Invisible Hand: Positive Political Externalities of Economic Globalization." *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 47, no.4 pp.561-86.

between states, because “growing interdependence creates similar economic interests across all states and a community of interests which will facilitate cooperation among states” (Woods 1996:14). Third, citizens who take advantage of trade oppose to any conflict that can inhibit the commercial relations. Larger that group in a dyadic relations lower the possibility of war. This is because an increase in economic interaction makes war against the interests of society since “citizens sell their goods, obtain goods, or have financial investments or investors there” (Russett and Oneal 2001:129). Last, Polachek (1980) argues that trade consolidates welfare system as a result of which states do not want to interrupt economic relationships with its partner country (cited in Barbieri 1996:31).

A vast number of studies have been done concerning the democratic peace argument of Kant. Most of those studies have found supportive results with regard to democratic dyads. Due to the political culture and domestic norms as well as institutional constraints in democratic states constrain states to fight each other. Russett (1993) discusses the features of democratic states and their influence on foreign policy making. He put forth two models that answer the question why democracies do not fight. According to the first model, similar political culture and decision-making processes provide democracies more information as well as an expectation that opponent will follow the same procedures in order to solve the conflict (ibid, p.30-38). No party expects a quick and harsh reaction from its opponent. Since the defining feature of democracies are ‘dovishness’ and ‘equality’ they are prone to compromise and nonviolence (ibid, p.31). This implies that in a democratic dyad, states seek diplomatic and political solutions to the problem. Moreover, citizens and politicians do not perceive other democracies as enemies. Since the states have same political regime they can easily empathize with each other. It is very common in democracies that “if people in a democracy perceive themselves as autonomous, self-governing people who share norms of live-and-let-live, they will respect the rights of others to self-determination if those others are also perceived as self-governing” (ibid, p.31).

The second model is based on the notion that democracies have institutional constraints which make decision making process more complicated and hard to take a decision of using force. The structure of division of power, checks and balances can refrain politicians to go to war (ibid, p.38). In democratic structure different from authoritarian states get the

popular support is very difficult due to the high numbers of actors in the political system, i.e. “bureaucracies, the legislature and private interest groups” (ibid, p.38). Moreover, in democracies politicians have to care about public opinion so that they can legitimize their decision and ensure reelection as well. Lastly, Russett indicates that because of the complexity of decision making process, democracies are not able to react instantly which provides time for negotiations before going to war (ibid, p.39). However, it is worth mentioning that democracies even though they do not fight each other can go to war with authoritarian states. To sum up, different political structures can generate different interests which result in a variation in dyadic relations.

Conclusion:

In this paper, I have tried to answer the question of why the notion of anarchic international system does not fit when we shift from a system level to unit level. The variation of relations between two states is not only the result of international anarchy as neorealism steadfastly claims. But as discussed in this paper, when a researcher applies different perspectives to study interstate relations he can draw different conclusions from his findings. When dealing with dyadic relations, we can first of all conclude that hierarchy can be identified within some dyads. Inter-state relations are located at a point between anarchy and hierarchy. Second, states can reach different calculations of their gains within a dyad unless the two states are enduring foes. Lastly, dyadic relations vary with respect to the extent of economic interdependence between two states, and with regard to the question of how similar cultural and institutional structures both of them possess. In conclusion, this essay has shed light on unit level analysis in international relations, which has showed that international politics has many dimensions, and thus researchers should be aware of different approaches and capable of looking at events from different levels by taking different factors into account.

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