

International Relations Meaning Definition and Scope

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In the very beginning of the civilized world the states were mutually interlinked. In modern times the world has greatly shrunk as a result of scientific and technological development. As a result, events in one part of the world have an immediate impact on the rest of the world. Therefore the states maintain regular relations with other states of the world. As an alone individual is nothing similarly, a state without other state is nothing and in the present complex life, a state without relations with other cannot survive. Materialistic needs, religion, economic requirements, industrialization, security matters and trade etc. brought the states together. Inter-states wars yielded post-war treaties, economic and friendly agreements and international organizations. All these things are studied by international relations.

International relations are an old subject and can be traced in the old tribes. It was utilized by the Greeks and Romans in their relations. As a regular subject, international relations took start in the World War-I era and specially because of the second World War, Cold War between USA and USSR, disintegration of USSR, New World Order (NWO) of USA, global role of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) emergence of international organization and diplomatic relations etc. developed this subject to great extent.

International Relations is the study and practice of political relationships among the world's nations, especially their governments. International relations mean interactions between nongovernmental groups, such as multinational corporations or international organizations such as the OIC or the United Nations (UN).

International relations is a broad and complex topic both for countries engaged in relationships with other nations, and for observers trying to understand those interactions. These relationships are influenced by many variables. They are shaped by the primary participants in international relations, including national leaders, oilier politicians, and nongovernmental participants, such as private corporations, and nongovernmental organizations. They are also affected by domestic political events and non-political influences, including economics, geography, and culture. Despite all of these other influences, the primary focus of international relations is on the interactions between nations.

To understand these interactions, experts look at the world as a system of nations whose actions are guided by a well-defined set of rules. They call this system the interstate system. The interstate system has existed for less than 500 years and is based on a common understanding of what a nation is and how it should treat other nations. But recent changes in technology and international norms have caused some scholars to question whether this system will continue in the future, or be replaced by some other system of relationships that is not yet known.

From September 1814 to June 1815 representatives of the major European powers convened in Vienna, Austria, to reorganize Europe following the defeat of French emperor Napoleon I. The Congress of Vienna, as this conference became known, was a major event in the history of international relations.

Until the 1970s the study of international relations centred mainly on international security studies, i.e. questions of war and peace. Scholars believed a nation's military power was the most important characteristic in determining how that nation would relate to others. As a result, scholars focused on the relative military strength of one nation compared to others, alliances and diplomacy between nations, and the strategies nations used to protect their territories and further their own interests.

Since the 1970s the importance of economics in international relations has increased and the study of international political economy has received increased attention. The primary force driving the interaction between nations is economic, not military. There is trade and economic relations among nations, especially the political cooperation between nations to create and maintain international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

In both security studies and international political economy, experts strive to explain patterns of conflict and cooperation among nations. Conflicts among nations are expected since their political and economic aims and interests often depart. Cooperation does not refer to the absence of conflict but to the ability of nations to peacefully resolve their differences in a way that is acceptable to all parties involved. When cooperation fails, conflicts often escalate into coercion and ultimately war.

The term 'International' was used for the first time by Jeremy Bentham in the later part of the 18th century with regard to the laws of nations. Consequently, the term "IR" was used to define the official relations between sovereign states.

The economic, social, cultural, political and military relations amongst the state of the world may also be included in the preview of the subject. Thus, there are broadly two views regarding the meaning of international relations.

Narrow view: According to this view 'IR' includes only "The official relations conducted by the authorized leaders of the states." According to this view other relations do not fall in the domain of IR'

Broad view: Some scholars have taken a broad view of international relations, and included apart from the official relations between states, all intercourse among states and all movements of people, goods and ideas across the national frontiers within its preview.

Definitions of IR

"International relations is the branch of political science that studies relations between countries of the world." (Encarta).

"It is not only the nations seek to regulate, varied types of groups-nations, states, governments, people, region, alliances, confederations, international organizations, cultural organizations, religious organizations must be dealt with in the study of international relations if the treatment is to be made realistic." (Quincy Wright)

"International relations is concerned with the factors and activities, that affect the external policies and the powers of the basic units into that the world is divided." (Hoffman).

“International relations is the discipline, that tries to explain political activities across state boundaries (Trevor Taylor).

It embraces all kinds of relations traversing state boundaries, no matter whether they are of an economic, legal, political or any other character, whether they be private or official, and all human behaviour originating on one side of a state boundary

International relations studies foreign relations, diplomacy. agreements and pacts, international law, international organizations, inter-state interaction, war and peace, international justice and alliances etc.

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NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The context and nature of International Relations have undergone major changes after the Second World War. Traditionally, world politics was centred around Europe and relations among nations were largely conducted by officials of foreign offices in secrecy. The common man was hardly ever involved, and treaties were often kept secret. Today public opinion has begun to play an important role in the decision-making process in foreign offices, thus, changing completely the nature of international relations. Ambassadors, once briefed by their governments, were largely free to conduct relations according to the ground realities of the countries of their posting. Today, not only nuclear weapons changed the nature of war and replaced erstwhile the balance of power by the balance of terror, but also the nature of diplomacy changed as well. We live in the jet age where the heads of state and government and their foreign ministers travel across the globe and personally establish contacts and conduct international relations. Before the First World War a traveller from India to Britain spent about 20 days in the sea voyage. Today, it takes less than 9 hours for a jet aircraft to fly from Delhi to London, telephones, fax machines, teleprinters and other electronic devices have brought all government leaders in direct contact. Hotline communication between Washington and Moscow, for example, keeps the top world leaders in constant touch. This has reduced the freedom of ambassadors who receive daily instructions from their governments.

Decolonisation has resulted in the emergence of a large number of sovereign states. The former colonies of the European Powers, including India, have become important actors on the stage of international relation. They were once silent spectators. Today, they participate in the conduct of world politics. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has created 15 members of the United Nations, instead of the previous three. Some of the very small countries like Nauru may have no power but they also have an equal voice in the General Assembly. Four very small countries viz. Liechtenstein, San Marino, Monaco and Andorra were admitted to the UN during 1990-93. The total number of UN members has gone up from 51 in 1945 to 185 in 1997. Thus, international relations are now conducted by such a large number of new nation-states. Besides, many non-state actors such as multinational corporations and transnational bodies like terrorist groups have been influencing international relations in a big way. With the collapse of the Soviet Union as a Super Power, the United States has emerged as the supreme monolithic power and can now dominate the international scene almost

without any challenge. The Non-Alignment Movement ((NAM) still exists but with the dismemberment of one of its founders (i.e.: Yugoslavia) and the disappearance of rival power blocs, the role of the 'Third World' has changed along with that of NAM.

Due to increasing human-activities, the relations among various states has been changing and due to these continuous change in International Relations, the nature of International Relations has been changing. Due to the changing nature of International Relations, it is difficult to explain the nature of International Relations. However, these are the following important points explaining the nature of International Relations.

1. No Single Definitions: International Relations has no single definition. Unfortunately, till date, no universally accepted definitions of International Relations have been coined because of its continuous changing nature.

2. Operates in Anarchical System: International Relations operates in an anarchical system. There is no single organisations to regulate among states. Michel Nicholson says that International Relations is study of aspects of anarchy, though an anarchy which is not necessarily chaotic.

3. Concerns with Global issues: International Relations deals with key issues which concerns public global interest. For example, every country has an interest in stopping global warming, goal that can be achieved only by many countries act together.

4. Nations as primary actors of International Relations: Politics is a process of interactions among groups and International politics is primarily a process of interactions among nations. Nations-states are the key actors but along with the several non-state, transnational and supra-national groups, these groups also play an important role in International Relations. The primacy, however, belongs to nations states because these still control all the instruments like coercion and violence in International Relations.

5. National interest as the objective: National interest is the objective that each nation attempts to secure in relations with other nations. International Politics basically involves the art of preserving or securing goals of national interests by using control over the other nations. It is the process by which each nationrise to safeguard and secure its interests in conditions of conflict with other nations.

6. Conflicts as the conditions of International Politics: the national interests of various nations are neither fully compatible nor fully incompatible. The incompatibility of national interest of various nation is a source of conflict at theinternational level which finds concrete manifestation in the form of disputes. However, the possibility of making the interests compatible through accommodation, adjustment and reconciliation leads to some cooperation among nations. As such, conflicts and cooperation as well as coercion and persuasion are always present in International Relations.

7. Power as the means: in conditions of conflict, each nation attempts to secure the goals of its national interest. The means for securing these goals in power. That is why each nation is continuously engaged in the process of acquiring, maintaining, increasing and using power. The power that backs a nation's attempt to secure its national interest called national power. Power in the context of International relations is conceptualised as national power.

8. Power as the means as well as the end in International Politics: In International Politics, power is both the means as well as end. Nations always use power for securing the goal of their nation interests. At the same time, they regard power as a vital part of their national interest and therefore try to build and keep a reserve of national power. Each nation always works for maintaining and increasing its National power.

9. International Politics as a process of conflict-resolution among Nations: Conflicts is the condition of International politics. It is the most important elect of International Politics because in the absence of conflicts of interests, power can have little function to perform. Conflict is the very basis of International Relations. It is at the root of both disputes and cooperation among nations. Conflicts of interests is a reality of International Relations. However, at the same time, it can't be denied that the existence of conflict compels the nations with similar goals of national interests to cooperate with each other.

10. International Politics involves continuous interaction among nations: since, the national interest of various nations are in conflict with one another, conflict cannot be completely eliminated from International society. However, at the same time, conflict must be resolved because unresolved conflicts can lead to war. This necessitates continuous attempts on the part of nations to adjust their relations with one another. Nations they to achieve this bemoans of their power and resources.

11. Interaction among foreign Policies: Since international environment is very complex and dynamic and each nation has to act in conditions characterised by conflict, cooperation, competition, war, tensions and uncertainties, it is essential for each nation to perform on the basis of its foreign policy. The relations among nations mostly take the form of interactions among the foreign policies of the nations.