

## ROBERT KEOHANE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DISCIPLINE: RESEARCH PROGRAMME, STATE AND INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

### ROBERT KEOHANE VE ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER DİSİPLİNİ: ARAŞTIRMA PROGRAMI, DEVLET VE ULUSLARARASI SİSTEM

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**Abstract:** Robert Keohane is one of the most important scholars of international relations discipline in terms of his contributions into the discipline through theoretical and conceptual contributions. In terms of the research programme, Keohane adopts rationalism and positivism. He thinks that reason with positivist research methods produces regular patterns in social science and in specific in IR and he expresses honestly in his works from the beginning what research programmes adopt. He brings severe criticisms against the new research programmes in IR, which he calls reflectivism. His views on state is very clear. Even though he is pioneer in bringing new actors to the IR in 1970s, he places state to the top and his explanations and analysis are centred on the state. More importantly, he considers domestic political system is important for change and cooperation in the international politics. However, he fails to analyse domestic politics. His international system is enlarged version of Kenneth Waltz's international system. Keohane adds international regimes and existence of hegemon to Waltz's system. In fact, he chooses to remain in the area of the realist school, focusing on the state and anarchy in the international politics apart from dependent on only positivist methods. Lastly, as Robert Cox put it rightly: "Theory is always for someone for some purpose", Keohane's efforts in IR aims to find alternative paths to political and economic order after the United States of America's hegemony ends.

**Keywords:** Institutional Neoliberal Theory, Rationalism, Positivism, International Institutions, International Regimes, Transnational Relations, Complex Interdependence.

**Öz:** Robert Keohane, teorik ve kavramsal katkıları açısından uluslararası ilişkiler disiplininin en önemli akademisyenlerinden biridir. Araştırma programı açısından Keohane, rasyonalizm ve pozitivistliği benimsemekte olduğunu dile getirmektedir. Pozitivist araştırma yöntemleri açısından aklın sosyal bilimlerde ve özellikle Uluslararası İlişkilerde düzenli kalıplar ürettiğini belirten Keohane benimsediği yaklaşımı başından itibaren çalışmalarında dürüstçe ifade etmektedir. Uluslararası İlişkilerdeki yeni araştırma programlarına (reflectivist) karşı sert eleştirilerde bulunmaktadır. Keohane'nin devlet konusundaki görüşleri ise oldukça açıktır. 1970'lerde Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplinine yeni aktörler kazandırmada öncü olmasına rağmen, devleti en üste koymakta ve açıklamaları ve analizleri ile devlete odaklanmaktadır. Daha da önemlisi, uluslararası politikada değişim ve işbirliği için ülke içi siyasi sistemin önemli olduğunu düşünmektedir. Ancak iç siyaseti detaylı bir şekilde analiz etmemektedir. Keohane'nin uluslararası sistemi, Kenneth Waltz'un uluslararası sisteminin genişletilmiş bir versiyonudur. Keohane, Waltz'un sistemine uluslararası rejimleri ve hegemonyanın varlığını eklediği görülmektedir. Aslında, Keohane'nin yalnızca pozitivist yöntemlere bağlı kalmasının yanı sıra, uluslararası politikada devlet ve anarşiye

*odaklanarak realist ekolün sınırları içinde kalmayı tercih ettiği söylenebilir. Son olarak, Robert Cox'un da doğru bir şekilde ifade ettiği gibi: "Teori her zaman birileri için, bir amaç için vardır". Keohane'nin uluslararası ilişkiler alanındaki çabaları, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin hegemonyasının sona ermesinden sonra siyasi ve ekonomik düzene alternatif yollar bulmayı amaçladığını ileri sürmek yerinde olacaktır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kurumsal Neoliberal Teori, Pozitivizm, Uluslararası Kurumlar, Uluslararası Rejimler, Sınıraşan İlişkiler, Kompleks Karşılıklı Bağımlılık.

## INTRODUCTION

Robert Keohane is one of the most influential and most prolific scholars of international relations as well as social science in general. His works have enhanced the discussions in international politics and the impetus for theoretical debates in the discipline. Although he acts in the domain of realist paradigm of international relations (IR)<sup>1</sup> discipline while focusing on power and state, his efforts are worth to mention for settling IR into more scientific basis.

Keohane has very closely worked and contributed to the discipline with several books and articles together with Joseph S. Nye. In this study, however Keohane will be specifically examined. Keohane brings two important issues into IR: structure and process. Apart from, he also contributes to thinking of new actors in the IR such as transnational organizations, multinational corporations, and international institutions. In terms of processes, he is pioneering complex interdependence, transitional relations, international regimes, and cooperation in international politics under anarchic nature of system.

In addition to enlarging the scope of world politics, he is also worth to mention in IR emphasising the impact of domestic politics in international relations in 1970s even though he does not seek a detailed investigation on domestic politics. More importantly, Keohane played the major role together with Robert Gilpin in the inclusion of international political economy (IPE) into IR discipline.

Keohane devoted himself to a more theory based international politics even though he is aware of the fact that generating theory in social sciences is almost an endless endeavour. Through his specific and different theories within the realm of realist paradigm, he directly and indirectly contributed to the diversification of IR theories.

Regarding the research programme, Keohane is an ardent follower of positivism and rationalism. He also accepts that he also uses interpretivism. In fact, positivism has been the most influential research programme in social science in general. This tendency is also very strong in IR. However, it should also be stated that other competing research programmes including the relation between research programmes and international relations are in the last 2-3 decades on the rise which positively impact the social science.

Positivist research programme has several characteristics: Firstly, it uses methodologies of natural sciences, observation (Smith, 1996: 15). Secondly, it aims to find out causal relations of the “observable phenomena”. Thirdly, the scientific inquiry searches for “facts” which are independent of values and theoretically

<sup>1</sup> IR with capital letters refers to international relations discipline in this article.

neutral. Fourthly, the research is based on “empirical validation” or “falsification”. IR scholar working on research programmes, Steve Smith claims that empiricism and positivism are used interchangeably in IR even though he believes there should be a differentiation while acknowledging difficulty in doing this distinction (Smith, 1996: 17). Another character of positivism is its quest for regularities. Once acquiring facts through observation will take the social scientist to “objective” and “ahistorical” laws and will make it possible for “prediction”.

In this article, it will aim to discover Keohane’s contributions to IR discipline in terms of research programme, state and international system through the insight of Critical Theory, or neo-Gramscian approach.<sup>2</sup> Keohane attempts for scientific IR search are in fact to be praised in his academic endeavours. However, it is also clear that Keohane is in search for the options for the United States of America (USA) in its foreign policy as well as continuation of its dominance in world politics. In fact, Keohane never denies his position and openly expresses his opinions and discussions in his books and articles. Declaring his attitude honestly in social science also needs to be praised although he follows value-free research programme positivism.

Neo-Gramscian approach brings a challenging insight into IR since the beginning of 1980s. Particularly Robert Cox’s article has paved the way for flourishing new approaches in IR. The challenge first of all, started against the positivist dominance in the discipline as explained just above and adopted the stance of Frankfurt School into IR discipline (Roach, 2013: 173-175). Therefore, it challenges to objectivity and value-free claim as well as ahistorical view of positivism. In connection with opposing objectivity and ahistorical position, it believes that values of the researcher greatly impacts the inquiry.

As Neo-Gramscian theory is critical theory in international relations, it uses interdisciplinary methodology in general. For this reason, empiricism, interpretivism and historicism can be applied in its research activity. Thirdly, it adopts emancipatory approach in analysing international politics since the academic quest is not only for explanation, it should also aim at changing the nature of world as well as understanding. Moreover, it does not accept that international relations is merely total interactions between states, rather it is continuously interacting with social movements, states, and world order in dialectical way. In fact, social relations of production is the starting point in critical theory. In other words, the relations between state-society define not only the national economic and political policies but also the world’s economic and political path. For this reason, there is a dynamic interaction, not static behaviour in international politics. It can be asserted that this results in an effort of unifying sociology, psychology, political science, international relations economics, law and history under its analysis.

It is also important that Keohane does not consider himself as a realist even though he establishes his theoretical assumptions on the basis of realist credentials. Kenneth Waltz is also another good example but from a different angle comparing to Keohane that he looks through the lens of a realist. However, he finds IR discipline weak and dormant in terms of the theoretical basis as most of the studies emphasise

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<sup>2</sup> The study considers that realist paradigm in general comprises of all branches of realism such as classical realism, neoliberal (institutional) realism, and structural realism.

the importance of history in understanding the current political developments in global affairs.

The article will deal with these issues in the following order: Keohane's views on research programme will be discussed first, and then his views on state and international system will be analysed. The article will try to assess the scholar's views on these three issues on the basis of the neo-Gramscian perspective.

Research methodology of the article takes Keohane's main studies as a basis of analysis. Keohane's phenomenal book, "*After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*" (1984), "*Transnational Relations and World Politics*" (with Joseph S. Nye) (1972), "*International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory*", (1989), "*Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World*" (2002), and the book written together with Nye "*Power and Interdependence*" (1997) will be taken as his base of works as well as his articles. Moreover, IR discipline's reference book in discussing Waltz's structural neorealism theory, "*Neorealism and Its Critics*" (1986) that Keohane's is the editor will be analysed. Keohane's last articles go to 2012 and 2020. In doing so, his views will be assessed in a historical context as it clearly demonstrates his changing views. Moreover, there are three articles analysing Keohane's studies and theories will be taken into account. These are namely the articles of Andrew Moravcsik's "Robert Keohane: Political Theorist"; Michael Suhr's "Robert O. Keohane: A Contemporary Classic" and J. Sterling-Folker's "Neoliberalism". The analysis, as said earlier, will be based on the neo-Gramscian theory of international relations. Thus, Robert Cox's book "*Approaches to World Order*" and particularly his pioneering article "Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory" will be mainly applied in analysing to Keohane's views in relation to research programme, state and international system. Furthermore, Stephen Gill's article "Epistemology, Ontology, and the 'Italian School'", Çağla Lüleci, and Erkam Sula's article "Survival 'Beyond Positivism?' The Debate on Rationalism and Reflectivism in International Relations Theory" and Steve Smith's "Positivism and Beyond" will specifically deal with the Keohane's research programme.

## 1. ROBERT KEOHANE AND RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Keohane endeavours great efforts for making IR discipline to be based on more concrete methods of social science as said previously. For this aim, he contributed specifically a study, namely, "*Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*" in 1994. In addition, he specifically wrote one article "Institutional Theory as a Research Program" for IR students. This attitude explains itself that Keohane seeks to settle IR into more scientific ground.

On the other hand, it is seen that one of the scholar's assessments on Keohane's research programme considers that he contributes to social science with three research programmes. Indeed, Keohane's theories "transnationalism/interdependence and international regimes" as well as "international institutionalism" are the theories utilising Lakatosian research programme but only in the sense they are based on positivist approach with historicism (Suhr, 1997: 96). This article will deal with international institutions and international regimes in the section of state and international system on the basis of Keohane's view.

First of all, Keohane in his book of *After Hegemony* (1984), honestly explains his position in terms of the research programmes: “My values necessarily affect my argument: yet I am sufficiently positivistic to attempt to distinguish between my empiric and normative assertions” (Keohane, 1984: 10). He even further gives details in his research programme as he says “historical and interpretive rather than an exercise in applied ethics” (Keohane, 1984: 10). He additionally warns the academia and readers that he adopts an interdisciplinary approach as well as eclectic approach. In fact, he is surely affected by the intellectual atmosphere of 1970s and 1980s particularly Marxism and liberalism over academia.

“I hope that readers will be careful not to seize on words and phrases out of context as clues to pigeonholing my argument. Is it "liberal" because I discuss cooperation, or "mercantilist" because I emphasize the role of power and the impact of hegemony? Am I a "radical" because I take Marxian concepts seriously, or a "conservative" because I talk about order? The simplemindedness of such inferences should be obvious” (Keohane, 1984: 11).

In an article in 2020, Keohane while explaining hegemony stresses that he was more influenced by Realism and Marxism rather than liberalism (Keohane, 2020: 5).

In his book of *International Institutions and State Power* (1989), Keohane explains himself specifically dedicated to his academic journey as well as personal ties in the second chapter of the book in the title of “A Personal Intellectual History”. The chapter set forth his purpose and his quest in academia very clearly: “The justification for spending one’s professional life studying world politics cannot, therefore be a purely scientific one. On the contrary, it is profoundly normative”. First of all, he acknowledges that a scholar exists with his values (Keohane, 2020: 21). However, being normative as Keohane implies “purely not scientific”. Keohane in that “purely scientific” means in fact, the quest for theory does not apply the positivist methods rather, it is indicating that his own opinions purely on world politics makes significant impact on what he has asserted and defended in IR. However, this seems for Keohane not enough to be able to consider a research or study as scientific. For him, finding out “causal relations” and “descriptive facts” in social science demonstrates the scientific success of the inquiry: “The social science we espouse seeks to make descriptive and causal inferences about the world” (Keohane, 1998: 195). In addition, in the beginning of 2000s, he clearly emphasises that his neoliberal theory follows “neo-positivists standards of evidence” like other realist scholars (Keohane, 2002: 6).

In *Neorealism and Its Critics* book that Keohane is the editor, he asserts that no one can overcome the issues in world politics without theories. Therefore, the theories guide the practitioners and students in the field of international politics. Keohane’s following statement also demonstrates about his fundamental approach to research programme:

“If a theory provides sufficiently accurate guidance about cause-effect relationships, and if its propositions about these relationships remain valid over time and under different conditions, practitioners may not need to study it deeply. They can learn its major theorems without being too concerned about how they were derived, or about the range of their theoretical application.” (Keohane, 1986: 5)

Keohane however puts himself into dilemma in the following paragraph of the same article;

“Both world politics and our values keep changing, there is no guarantee that even a well-tested theory will remain valid in the future. Each proposition of any theory of world politics should therefore be scrutinized carefully to ascertain the range of its applicability, its robustness under different conditions, and the likelihood of its being overtaken by events.” (Keohane, 1986: 5)

He acknowledges that this is “paradoxical” but “critical reevaluation” is very necessary since social science is different from physics. His rejection to ahistorical attitude is important to mention since Keohane is an ardent supporter of positivism.

Keohane’s speech in International Studies Association in 1988 is also milestone in IR discipline in terms of intensifying debates on research programmes, in fact is a clear indication that Keohane strongly opposes any other research programmes other than positivism. It is also seen that he brings harsh criticisms to other research programmes. First of all, he considers by his labelling “reflectivism”<sup>3</sup> is not a research programme in the sense of Lakatosian meaning as it is not clear in terms of its research programme and its methodologies. He also advises that scholars of reflective approach are to develop “testable theories” in order to be evaluated. He certainly implies that this is basic prerequisite at least to be regarded as scientific research programme. In addition, it is seen in general that rationalist/positivist scholars also criticize the challenging approaches on grounds of their epistemology and ontology of the studies (Smith, 2013: 6; Lüleci and Sula, 2016: 46-47).

On the contrary, reflectivist scholars also criticize positivist scholars on the same grounds that their epistemological and ontological views are flawed. In terms of epistemology, their knowledge production simply reflects the dominant views of the paradigm not only in IR but also in social science. Regarding the ontology, while IR’s realist school takes the state as the starting point of international relations, reflectivist scholars refer to social groups and social movements and state is considered that it emerges as a new phase of political and economic developments.

Keohane also admits that social sciences in general do not have comprehensive theories:

“We do not have theories that can fully explain the past, and we certainly cannot predict the future. Prospectively, we seem to know too little to account for events; retrospectively, we know too much since “everything seems relevant” and it is difficult to sort out causality. Past events seem “overdetermined”; the future is “underdetermined.” (Keohane, 1989: 21)

His statement is clearly against the ahistorical nature of international relations which realist paradigm considers as a fact on the basis of its positivistic assumptions. In his 2020 article published in Annual Review of Political Science, he re-emphasises this view in a similar manner by saying “it is probably general rule in

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<sup>3</sup> For Keohane, reflectivist research programme includes critical theory, constructivism and any other post-positivist approaches.

social science that there are no unconditional laws: One always asks under what conditions certain outcomes will appear.” (Keohane, 2020: 7).

Keohane applies to theories of political science and economics in explaining world affairs like his colleague from the realist paradigm school, Robert Gilpin, directly takes theories of economics for analysing international politics. However, as he stated his political theory is mainly derived from the theories of economics discipline. In *After Hegemony*, he applies rational choice theory and collective goods theory as well as game theory (Keohane, 1984: 13). In applying those economic theories, Keohane always aims at finding the outcomes of the international relations. Especially his main concern is that how “cooperation” in world politics is possible and still exists in the international affairs.

Keohane in terms of research programme applies rationalism and interpretivism. While rationalism is based in “reason”, interpretivism is looking at the discourse or the text. However, he mainly uses rationalism with positivism’s methods. In this regard, his use of “rational choice theory” is based on the view that the individuals are “utility maximizers” and a thorough examination of individuals’ behaviours will produce “observed outcomes” (Kurki and Wight, 2013: 24). Keohane replaces individuals with states in rational choice theory through applying to IR discipline. Then, he believes that prediction in international politics is possible even though he admits there are some limitations. For this reason, he explicitly seeks how to consider and to manage the world order after the US hegemony erodes. This paves the way that Keohane’s works leads to producing the neoliberal institutionalist theory. On the other hand, Keohane’s view on realism in general is very clear. He also openly criticises realist theories by non-involvement of ideas and of domestic politics into the studies including himself (*After Hegemony*) and Waltz (*Theory of International Politics*) (Keohane, 2002: 6).

Keohane also differentiates himself from the positivist mainstream by accepting “ideas” as important determinant of any action particularly in policy making since “ideas influence policy” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 3). In the beginning of his book, *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, he refers to power of rationalist approach in analytical research and then he asserts that the “empirical anomalies” are to be understood by the ideas (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 3). He also classifies ideas into 3 categories: world beliefs (religion); principled beliefs (scientific rationality) and causal beliefs (Keohane, 2020: 8). For Keohane, ideas are like “road maps” signalling which way to go for policy makers such as Keynesian economic policies after the Second World War or act like “focal points” as happened in European Union. In *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, Keohane clearly states “As scholars, we devote our lives to the creation, refinement, and application of ideas. If we really thought ideas were irrelevant, our lives as social scientists would be meaningless. Our exploration of the impact of ideas on foreign policy is also a search for personal meaning and relevance in our own lives” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 30). The examples for ideology’s impact on states can be the establishment of capitalist and liberal ideology in Western Europe while Eastern Europe adopted socialist ideology in politics as well in economy after the end of Second World War.

Keohane’s application of ideas into international relations is really important. He is well aware the fact that ideas define not only states’ direction in world politics, but

also society-state relations together with the institutions in economic and political sphere. Neo-Gramscian theory particularly Robert Cox gives priority to production. However, this production has various and comprehensive meanings: production of material goods; production of ideas; production of norms; production of institutions; and production of social practices (Sinclair, 1996: 9). Cox considers this production process in historical conjecture since there are dialectical relations among ideas, material capabilities and institutions in establishing or transforming the social and state structures (Cox, 1996: 97-99).

As conclusion of this part, Keohane's position in research programmes reflects adopting an eclectic approach due to his positivist background with rationalism even though he admits the importance some issues raised by reflectivist theories such as ideas, no universal laws in social science. He clearly advocates for rationalist approach as his educational background as well as his strong belief in production of knowledge on experience, observations and regular occurrences makes him follow positivist research programme.

## 2. ROBERT KEOHANE AND STATE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Keohane is the pioneer of neoliberal institutionalist theory in IR. This theory was developed in 1970s as a result of recent developments in economic and political developments in the Western world. According to Keohane, this required new approach in international politics as a theory. In fact, it simply reflects the economic and political order established under the American leadership was in crisis. Therefore he has to establish a theory which will replace capitalist and US led politics after leading state is away. Indeed, neoliberal institutionalist theory finds a middle way while capitalist economic relations and western led institutions remain untouched even without the USA. For this reason, as said earlier, his main aim is to find out "cooperation" not only between states but also among states and the other actors.

In this framework, Keohane's attitude on the state in international relations is clear. Even in *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (1972), Keohane and Nye express that "states have been and remain the most important actors in world affairs... States virtually monopolize large-scale, organized force which remains the ultimate weapon and a potent bargaining resource. Thus, there would be no point in ignoring the nation-state" (Keohane and Nye, 1972: xxiv).

Indeed, Keohane at least aims at testable concept of state in realist school of IR. Keohane in his *After Hegemony*, by referring to Gilpin's work on international political economy, asserts that "wealth" and "power" are the two fundamental concepts of international relations: "Wealth and power are linked in international relations through the activities of independent actors, the most important of which are states, not subordinated to worldwide governmental hierarchy" (Keohane, 1984: 18).

Keohane's definition of state regards even indirectly different social groups and social movements within the state. However, he in this definition, considers more the state as a unique and solid structure (Sterling-Folker, 2013: 117). In fact, this is the general attitude of realist school. On the other hand, Keohane differentiates himself



by his recognising the impact of domestic politics on state in formulating and directing policies as well as interests of state. In his *After Hegemony* which gives full account of his neoliberal institutionalist theory, while mentioning the importance of domestic politics, he does not go deeper in his analysis. Indeed, the impact of social groups and social movements in domestic political systems are not studied in his works. This led to a debate that neoliberalism and neorealism are just two branches of realism. Later in his *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World* (2002), Keohane admits that he “deliberately overlooked” domestic politics for “purposes of simplification” (Keohane, 2002: 4).

Keohane also expresses that wealth and power need to be measured in order to explain outcomes of behaviours of states even though measuring wealth is easier, it is rather difficult in power for scholars working on world politics. Keohane regards wealth and power as state objectives and both complement each other. He gives example of economic and political order established in the Western Europe and Japan by the United States of America (USA) after the end of the Second World War. The USA’s military power and economic interests simply led to such international order based on capitalist system (Keohane, 1984: 22). Additionally, Keohane also claims that aiming wealth and power are mainly followed by the states in order to establish a framework that will enable them to pursue their interests in the international affairs (Keohane, 1984: 25).

In fact, it is very clear in his at least two studies (*After Hegemony* and *Power and Interdependence*), state emerges as a central point. These studies seek the behaviour of states under different historical conjectures in terms of theoretical and practical cooperation in world affairs. Moreover, another important point is that the cooperation is also primarily sought among the states.

However, it should be noted that Keohane is also pioneer in enlarging the scope of international relations even in the beginning of 1970s. Although he admits the importance of state in IR, he also led to inclusion of various other actors such as international organisations, multinational corporations as well as social movements and transnational relations. For Keohane, multinational corporations also look for wealth and power, but it is not comparable to the states to large extent. For this reason, he omits multinational corporations from his analysis and focuses on states.

As actors in international politics, international organizations are considered by Keohane as an instrument for cooperation at the international level. Moreover, they reduce the transaction costs in line with what international regimes envisage. They enable to make negotiations of states. In addition, international organizations “facilitate linkages among issues within regimes and between regimes” and provide information (Keohane, 1984: 244-245). Thus, the other actors in international politics are merely subsidiary to state for Keohane. Even it can be induced that they are totally dependent on state even though the scope of international relations was expanded by Keohane’s contribution to the discipline.

Evaluating recent international politics and international economy under more authoritarian political atmosphere at the global level after 2008 financial crisis gives

credibility to Keohane's assertions on international institutions.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the conflicts especially in the Middle East and in Ukraine proves that international institutions are totally dependent on state's initiatives rather than their own initiatives. On the contrary, even for peace negotiations are still led by states, recently by the USA under Trump leadership as it is the case for negotiations on Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, Ukraine-Russia war and the Gaza conflict in the Middle East during 2025. The United Nations which was established to protect peace at the world level, has been partly participating in these negotiations or simply non-existent. It is also the same for international economic institutions particularly International Monetary Fund (IMF) which was reassigned the role in 1980s for the guardian-like of neoliberal economic order is invisible while states takes the control of the issues in international economy themselves since 2008.

In terms of processes, Keohane also mostly uses transnational relations in terms of the relations among national bureaucracy and international bureaucracy. Even if Keohane refers to other than bureaucratic relations, in one point he believes that transnational relations do not affect the "high politics" (Keohane and Nye, 1974: 371). Taking the issue of transnational relations as secondary simply demonstrates the domination of "state" in realist thought in this regard. Secondly, international regimes can be regarded as a process of international affairs since they are a set of rules and on specific issue of international relations and reflect mere state's interests.

Keohane's contribution with Nye of "complex interdependence" in 1970s also refers to states and their interaction with each other. Keohane emphasises the importance of enhanced transnational relations on several issues as well as contacts in international politics and international economy. This enhanced transnational relations for him decrease the risk of use of force as an effective instrument in foreign policies of states. However, "interdependence is frequently asymmetrical and highly political: indeed, asymmetries in interdependence generate power resources for states, as well as for non-state actors" (Keohane, 2002: 2-3). In *Power and Interdependence*, he mentions asymmetrical interdependence gives leverage to "less dependent actors" in terms of bargaining power and political resource over some issues (Keohane and Nye, 2012: 8-9).

In *After Hegemony*, he also recognises by saying "interdependence in world political economy generates conflict" (Keohane, 1984: 243). Any changes in economy or increasing any costs like happened in oil in 1970s create "discord" among states through "incompatible policies" (Keohane, 1984: 243). In this situation, a hegemon or international regimes can play important role in bringing harmony of cooperation policies and preventing discord at the international level. The USA's hegemonic power till the end of 1960s provided such an environment. Nevertheless Keohane believes that it is no longer possible for USA's return to hegemonic leadership in international affairs or "any other country will come to occupy such a position". (Keohane, 1984: 244).

On other hand, it is obvious that referring to social movements and transnational relations as well as hegemony with the impact of influential Marxist theory over the

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<sup>4</sup> Referring to global financial crisis in 2008 here is used in Gramscian meaning pointing to ideological crisis of neoliberal capitalist order and emerging no new ideology replacing neoliberalism or simply, passive revolution.

intellectual academia of the 1970's were included in *Transnational Relations and World Politics* as well as in *After Hegemony*. Several American scholars like Gilpin admitted that this intellectual environment affected them very much in terms of thinking during that decade. However, it is also to be noted that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, particularly American scholars consider that importance of Marxist thought has lost its weight over the academia.

In terms of neo-Gramscian theory in international relations, it is clear that he only focuses on the state even though he is well aware that ideology and social movements are important in international politics. However, he generally leaves out these dimensions in his analysis. Secondly, he omits the social processes which dialectically works with state, world orders and society. Thirdly, for Keohane, capitalism is important especially for international political economy but its impact on society is also missing although in 1960s and 1970s it was widely studied by scholars from sociology, political science history and economics.

Interestingly, he acknowledges the importance of capitalism over society as it creates tensions and movements all over the world not only in advanced countries but also in the poor countries in 2020 article:

“Looking back to at my work from the perspective of 2019, I think that my analysis did not adequately take into account the predatory aspects of capitalism combined power and privilege that would accrue to multilateral corporations and billionaires from globalization.” (Keohane, 2020: 12-13)

He in fact further mentions that increasing ground of populist movements in the word in general. Moreover, he also addresses the issues such as immigration from poor states and declining economic power of middle class and working class in rich states.

### **3. ROBERT KEOHANE AND INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Keohane's views international system is similar to his understanding of state. It is apparent that for Keohane, international system is considered mostly related with the state. Especially in international system, he believes that “hegemon” is sine qua non for international relations. He structures his theories more based on the existence of a hegemon at the world level. In this regard, hegemon can easily be understandable: the USA. In fact, it explains that it was driving main reason why he wrote *After Hegemony*.

He starts looking at the international system in his *After Hegemony* by referring to Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*:

“State behaviour can be studied from the “inside-out” or from the “outside-in”. “Inside-out,” or unit-level, explanations locate the sources of behaviour within the actor—for instance, in a country's political or economic system, the attributes of its leaders, or its domestic political culture. “Outside-in” or systemic, explanations account for state behaviour on the basis of attributes of the system as a whole.” (Keohane, 1984: 25)

Keohane's definition of international system takes Waltz's main 3 characteristics of the international system into consideration:

1. Ordering principle: Waltz believes that international politics is different from domestic politics in terms of subordination. While there is a hierarchical establishment in domestic political systems while in international political systems, there is no hierarchy. Under these conditions, prerequisite aim of states is survival. Waltz therefore asserts that international political system acts under anarchy (Waltz, 1979: 91-93).
2. The characters of the units: Waltz firstly mentions different institutions in domestic political systems. However, he defines actors in the international system as unique. "The states are the units of international-political systems are formally differentiated by the functions they perform. Anarchy entails relations of coordination among a system's units, and that implies their sameness" (Waltz, 1979: 93). Secondly, Waltz also mentions other actors in international politics by pointing to multinational corporations and other non-state actors together with transnational relations. However, he considers that they cannot control their environment. Thirdly, Waltz emphasises by referring to systems theory in general that interactions of states establish the structure of the international system.
3. The Distribution of capabilities: Waltz believes that there is no functional distribution of capabilities in the international system as it is the case in the domestic political systems. In this framework, there is a distribution of power among the states in the international politics since power is not distributed equally even though the states are the same (Waltz, 1979: 97-101).

Keohane criticises Waltz's international system. First of all, "balance of power" which Waltz considers it is the only theory in international politics, cannot explain change since it demonstrates a static situation. Secondly "rationality", related with change considers in stability of "bipolar balance", while it cannot be assumed such a situation for misjudging possibilities. Another criticism come from the issues of "interests or motivations of states" by the principle of maximizing power of states which is not always true since some states seek self-preservation (Keohane, 1986: 171-175). Lastly, for Keohane, Waltz's "fungibility of power resources" is not clear. For example, Keohane agrees with Waltz's claim that military power is not "perfectly fungible". However, on the other issues related to power resources requires clarification. Keohane, instead recommends to apply "issue-structure theories" (Keohane, 1986: 181-187).

Apart from acknowledging Waltz's basic tenets of international system, Keohane also takes the issue of international system by means of structure and process in *Power and Interdependence*. In this regard, while structure is used in terms of "distribution of capabilities among the similar units", process takes the interactions such as "allocative or bargaining behaviour" among the actors of the international system (Keohane and Nye, 2011: 18-20). Keohane focuses more on the process of the international system. Particularly the interaction and relations of actors are combined into structure and thus it can be said that Keohane aims to enrich

structure approach in explaining international system through the process and interactions of states.

In *After Hegemony*, he adds more characteristics to the international system. For Keohane, international system provides limitations and rewards for the states. Thus, system directly or indirectly defines the behaviour of states. This is based on the Waltz's distribution of power in international system. Keohane adds here; the concept of distribution of wealth. Wealth also determines behaviour of states. Secondly, "international regimes" play important role in the behaviour of states as they have an impact on the decisions of states. Thirdly, any systemic analysis in Keohane's opinion is incomplete without taking the dominant power into account. For this reason, it is absolutely necessary to examine the USA for better explanation of international system (Keohane, 1984: 26).

International regimes for Keohane are important instruments for hegemon in order to increase cooperation at the world level in international politics. Keohane states that international regimes has four components: principles, norms (standards of behaviour), rules, and decision-making procedures. "Principles, norms, rules, and procedures all contain injunctions about behavior: they prescribe certain actions and proscribe others. They imply obligations, even though these obligations are not enforceable through a hierarchical legal system" (Keohane, 1984: 59). Keohane believes that sovereignty and self-help are two conditions that weakens international regime (Keohane, 1984: 62). Nevertheless, the US-led international regimes established earlier were still making possible the cooperation at the world level (Keohane, 1984: 244).

"International regimes should not be interpreted as elements of a new international order "beyond the nation-state." They should be comprehended chiefly as arrangements motivated by self-interest: as components of systems in which sovereignty remains a constitutive principle. This means that, as Realists emphasize, they will be shaped largely by their most powerful members, pursuing their own interests. But regimes can also affect state interests" (Keohane, 1984: 63). For this reason, even Keohane defines that international regime is also important factor in international system, it has certain weaknesses. On the other hand, Keohane seems to think that international regimes can transform even the powerful states although they define the rules, principles and standards depending on the changes in the international system. The international regimes in interdependent world can also decentralize international system. Finally, Keohane thinks that international regimes as an interim solution acts between distribution of power in the international system and behaviour of states and non-state actors by enhancing cooperation at the international level.

Lastly, international system's salient component is hegemon for Keohane. In *After Hegemony*, he refers to hegemony theory as he is greatly influenced by the opinions of Antonio Gramsci. In addition, it is seen that Keohane is also influenced by Immanuel Wallerstein's Dependency Theory. Thus, he combines Gramsci's hegemony theory and Wallerstein's dependency theory as well as realist school's theories into his theory of institutionalism neoliberalism. On the other hand for the scholars of realist school, hegemony is simply preponderance of material resources. For this dominance, control of raw materials, control of markets, control of capital as

well as “competitive advantage in the production of highly valued goods” are the fundamental areas that hegemon should have superiority (Keohane, 1984: 32).

Keohane considers that Gramsci’s “ideological hegemony” concept gives important insights for his neoliberal theory. Hegemony for Keohane is “one state is powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing interstate relations and willing to do so” (Keohane, 1984: 34-35). Therefore, it is seen that Keohane is quite aware of the fact that the concept of hegemony in realist paradigm has certain weaknesses. Firstly, it is just depending on material dominance which does not yield all the time the expected results. Secondly, even the material dominance is not evidently explained as it is the case for British hegemony before the First World War (Keohane, 1984: 36-37).

Keohane also asserts that international system including international regimes is established by a hegemon at the global level. Therefore existence of a hegemon is also very necessary and constitutive element of international system. This hegemon should have military power in order to enforce not only order and rules but also to protect international political economy. In fact, it is clear that international political economy directly points to international capitalism under the USA leadership for enlarging scope or smooth functioning of capitalism. He gives two examples: the USA’s policy on Japan during the Second World War by preventing Japanese access to oil; and the USA’s policy on ensuring flow of oil into the capitalist markets after the Second World War (Keohane, 1984: 39-40).

Hegemonic stability theory is also worth to mention in understanding Keohane. Charles Kinderberger, Robert Gilpin and Stephen Krasner has contributed to the development of the Hegemonic Stability Theory. Keohane is also important contributor to the theory. In general, hegemonic stability theory aims to postulate that hegemonic state power provides the basis for stable and open capitalist economic system at the world level.

On the other hand, the theory is for Keohane refers to open and stable capitalist system after the USA power is in decline. Theory for him “holds that hegemonic structures of power, dominated by a single country, are most conducive to the development of strong international regimes whose rules are relatively precise and well obeyed. According to the theory, the decline of hegemonic structures of power can be expected to presage a decline in the strength of corresponding international economic regimes” (Keohane, 1989: 75). The examples of the theory is British dominance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and American dominance after the Second World War.

Keohane then analyses three regimes: international trade regime; international regime; and international oil regime. His analysis, as said, focuses on the decline in the USA economic power and changes in three regimes by applying the hegemonic stability theory or the period of 1967-1977. His conclusion is also important to mention. Especially changes in US power do not explain the changes in international trade regime while changes in oil and money regimes are more in line with the changes in the US power. Secondly, it is better to focus on the domestic politics to understand changes in international regimes (Keohane, 1989: 94-96). His words on the significance of domestic politics for understanding change is important since neo-Gramscian theory’s one of the fundamental criticism is realist school’s insufficiency through ignoring state-society complex.

In searching cooperation in international politics, Keohane also refers to Marxist theories apart from Gramsci. Karl Kautsky's ultra-imperialism theory which considers capitalism can be stable, even without internal fights, challenges Lenin's inevitability of war among imperialist powers in imperialist theory (Keohane, 1984: 41-46, 97). However, if there is no hegemon, which Keohane thinks that the American hegemony is eroding after 1970s, international institutions and particularly international regimes are the answers for continuing cooperation at the global level in terms of political as well as economic order in the post hegemonic era (Keohane, 1984: 244-45).

An important article of Keohane is the article "The Old IPE and the New" published in Review of International Political Economy in 2009. He points to expansion of capitalism especially in Asia like in India and China and Latin America. Keohane believes that this situation in fact his concept of "asymmetrical interdependence" leads to questionable. He also states that previous works of international political economy based on the developed countries since there was no progress in developing countries. Thus, international political economy should for Keohane take more seriously these states into consideration. Additionally, he asserts that expansion of capitalism also brings more volatility in financial and energy markets. Moreover, electronic technologies for communication have changed finance and economy. However, he questions its impact on the political power has not been adequately studied yet (Keohane, 2009: 38-40).

Apart from these statements, it can be induced from Keohane's article that there are two-sided development in terms of actors in international politics. Firstly, state is still the most important actor but new actors are emerging such as China, India, and Brazil. For this reason, he raises hegemon issue to be revisited as saying "I expect that our hegemonic assumptions will continue to hamper our vision". Secondly Keohane believes "global corporations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, or Greenpeace" have become "global actors". These civil society organisations acting globally needs more attention in world politics although there have been several research programmes addressing this global civil society and its impact on the international politics (Keohane, 2009: 40-42).

Keohane in his "Twenty Years of Institutional Liberalism" article in 2012 responds developments in international politics theoretically and practically. According to Keohane, there are three developments in international politics as of 2010s in terms of institutional neoliberalism:

- a. "An increase in legalization"; Keohane means by legalization that the rules of some institutions are "precise" and "obligatory". For him, the decisions of some of the institutions have become legally more binding and therefore grown stronger especially on human rights and criminal issues.
- b. "Increasing legalism and moralism expressed by the people leading civil society efforts to create and modify international institutions"; For Keohane, this area is not regulated and it reflects the beliefs of people. It gained a momentum with the social movements after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Therefore, there is a long way to legalization in this issue.

- c. “A decline in the coherence of some international regimes along with failure to increase the coherence of others”. Keohane thinks that coherence of international regimes are in decline (Keohane, 2012: 128).

There is one more issue in his article that Keohane does not list on the recent developments although he makes an explanation. It is how he assesses the state and especially USA’s foreign policy: He claims that state protects its power in international politics. Although moralism has been important in recent decades, Keohane considers the USA’s foreign policy has become “arrogant” in the last decades especially after 2000s. This arrogance in foreign policy is reflected in Iraq and he believes it would be the same in Afghanistan (Keohane, 2012: 131). In addition, he is also surprised that by the election of Donald Trump as USA president in 2016. Keohane seems to consider this situation as an anomaly even though he accepts that recourse to force in international relations by a hegemon power is normal, he considers the foreign policy decisions of the USA to act in 2000s were taken by the distorted analysis. Therefore, he cautiously rejects the anomaly in his institutional neoliberal theory. However he admits that losing ground in multilateralism, liberal values and cosmopolitanism in the western states in terms of the international political system (Keohane, 2020: 11).

In terms of neo-Gramscian theory, Keohane’s international system simply reflects state dominated realist theory since he predominantly takes state as starting point in his analysis of international system. On the other hand, Cox asserts that there is a need for holistic view. In this regard, he again points to dialectical relations among social forces emerged from production process; forms of state emerged from “state-society complexes” and world orders emerged from “particular configuration of forces”. These historical structures are constantly in interaction and influences each other. Cox gives the example of bourgeoisie as transnational social force in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Forms of state can also influence social forces by use of coercive means. World order can change the forms of state. Stalinism intended to stop expansion of capitalist-liberal world order into Eastern Europe (Cox, 1996: 100-101).

In addition, Keohane’s hegemony concept is also in conflict with neo-Gramscian theory of hegemony. In Gramscian meaning, hegemony is a set of values (and ideology) permeating into society as well as state structures (Gill, 1993: 41-42). The values processed by social relations of production are generally accepted by the society and state structures with their consent. Moreover, neo-Gramscian theory also admits hidden coercion. It is also asserted that hegemony cannot be produced by a state or a group of states. It is produced by social forces in interaction of material capabilities, ideas and institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Keohane’s contribution into the IR discipline and social science are worth to mention. Widening the scope of IR through new actors and new processes brings different insights for social science as well as IR. He tried to settle positivism and its research methods through directly writing and creating discussion environment on the research of international politics itself. As stated by himself in his studies, he directly adopts rationalist and interpretivist approach in addition to positivism.



Keohane admits that ahistorical attitude is impossible in social science. Therefore there is a continuous need for rethinking and analysing the events and even concepts since every event and concept historically changes on the basis of the conjuncture of politics. On the other hand, he clearly objects to reflectivist research programmes due to lack of “testable theories”. In addition, Keohane in social science brings “ideas” influenced by Hegelian/Marxist approach into the international relations. All of these approaches are clearly creating a paradox with his words. In fact, this is seen in other realist scholars such as Gilpin.

Keohane in his 2012 article re-emphasises his reluctance to accept the reflectivist research programmes, particularly Cox’s research programme by saying “I also value the discipline of social science, as reflected in American IPE, which seeks to separate value judgements from positive analysis” (Keohane, 2009: 43). It is seen that he keeps his position on his critique to reflectivist approach of 1988 IPA talk even in 2012 as well as adopting objectivity and regularity in the international politics.

First of all, Keohane repeatedly claims in his works that he constructs his theories on realist assumptions although he admits there are deficiencies in realist theory. Secondly, Keohane considers that state is and will be the most important actor in international affairs. He regards that state’s main interests are to increase its wealth and power. However, this view of pursuing wealth and power is analysed only at the international level. The root causes of seeking wealth and power are never discussed. Furthermore, he accepts basic premise of realist school that the states act under anarchy since there is no hierarchic power in world.

Even though Keohane deliberately chooses to remain within the theories of realist paradigm, he contributes to thinking of IR discipline through processes and structures such as international regimes, complex interdependence, and transnational relations as well as new actors in international politics such as multinational corporations, international institutions, and in the recent years international civil society organisations (like Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, Greenpeace).

It is important that Keohane expands IR discipline in terms of the new actors and processes even in the beginning of 1970s. Keohane also refers to importance of domestic political systems in directing foreign policy of the states. However, he never tries to seek in-depth analysis of impact of the social structure into the state’s inclinations. Although there is a reference to new actors and domestic politics by Keohane in his studies, it is also clear that he does not seek an analysis of state-society complex even in liberalist view.

International system for Keohane is an enlarged vision of Waltz’s international system. He acknowledges Waltz’s three criteria of the system. However, he adds two more criteria to this definition. Firstly, international regimes created by the stronger states have the capacity to transform even those states establish them as they bring new rules and standards that all parties are obliged to obey. Secondly, there is need for a hegemon to establish an international regime in international system.

Even though Keohane always seeks to be objective in social science, he never hide his intentions of steering the USA and its foreign policy through his lenses in international politics. In most of the articles, Keohane deliberately explains his

attitude and even his *After Hegemony* is written for the purpose of finding alternatives after the USA's hegemony is over in world politics.

Thinking of current international politics as of 2025, it can be interpreted that Keohane's views on state and international system as well as research programmes will be not much different from what he wrote previously except the tendencies of more authoritarian regimes including the developed states since he has more liberal version of international politics supported by international institutions and regimes and strengthened by the transnational relations.

Keohane would continue to consider state as main actor. He would ascertain that state continue to pursue wealth and power in international politics. However, he would question the attributes of international system and he added new features to Waltzian international system; international regimes and hegemon. He would definitely criticise the inefficiency and impotence of the UN and its organisations not only for maintaining peace but also economic expansion of capitalism. Nevertheless, it is apparent that leader country's recent policies, in this case, the USA's policies would make him bewildered such as tariff policy and threat to use of force or recourse to force in the Middle East, Latin America, in Africa or in Afghanistan even though he accepts in his studies that coercion is always a possible alternative in international politics especially for hegemonic power. Thus, Keohane's inquiry about the cooperation in global politics would be mostly possible by coercion, not by states' and societies' own wills except certain international regimes.

In terms of neo-Gramscian approach, Keohane's studies overlook social relations of production even though he acknowledges the fact that domestic politics is important in the direction of foreign policy as he continuously refer to in most of the studies he wrote. Nevertheless, it is also obvious that state-society relations in Keohane and generally in realist paradigm are not deeply analysed. On the other hand, neo-Gramscian theory of international relations takes social relations of production in Marxist approach as the base which directly impacts on the state and then the orders in world politics. Therefore, it believes that change in social relations of production certainly will change the world politics as well as state structure. Secondly, idea and then ideology play significant role in neo-Gramscian analysis. Ideology which is in close interaction with the mode of production define the course of social movements and then state. For Keohane, ideas shape the course of any policy including the foreign policy even the world order. However, as he says, he is more focused on the effects rather than causes in terms of its impact on the foreign policy and does not seek further in-depth analysis.

Keohane significantly contributes to IR theoretically as well as intellectually. However, he chooses to remain in the realist paradigm of IR in terms of the research programme, state and international system. In doing so, he aims to find new directions for the USA or post-hegemonic since he believes its leadership is decreasing on politics and economy at the world level. On the other hand, it is clear that capitalism under USA leadership continues to shape international politics, international economy and international society through consent or coercion.

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