

## **The Cold War Re-Visited: Explaining and Understanding of the End of the Cold War in Light of Neo-Realism**

**Sezai Özçelik\***

### **Abstract**

Neorealism is certainly the most analyzed and criticized theoretical approach. This study is no exception. The Cold War was unexpectedly ended in the 1989-1991 period. One of the main criticisms of neorealism is that it failed to predict an end to the Cold War. In international relations discipline, theories have rarely predictive ability. For the neorealist theorists, especially Waltz claims that the prediction issue is not a major criticism because neo-realism does not aim to predict the behavior of individual states at any given time. The main objective of neorealism is to explain the logic of individual relationships in the international state system. This article aims to offer new ideas whether neorealism tells us about the Cold War in terms of explanation about the events that may re-emerge in global political scene almost twenty-five year later. Another important contribution of this article is to analyze the success and failure of the neorealist explanation and understanding of the Second Cold War of 1979-1985 in order to shed lights on the future the Third Cold War that is a political reality in terms of a Russian threat and a West response after the 2014 Crimean Crisis. It should be stressed that neorealism has the explanatory rather than the predictive power.

### **Keywords**

Cold War, Neorealism, Kenneth Waltz, Soviet Union, United States, Third Cold War.

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\* Associate Prof. Dr., Çankırı Karatekin University, Faculty of Administrative and Economics Sciences, Department of International Relations.

[sezaiozcelik@gmail.com](mailto:sezaiozcelik@gmail.com), [sozcelik@karatekin.edu.tr](mailto:sozcelik@karatekin.edu.tr)

([orcid.org/0000-0003-0845-8465](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0845-8465))

Makale geliş tarihi : 14.08.2017

Makale kabul tarihi : 28.08.2017

## **Introduction**

The end of the Cold War left a fiery intellectual debate in its wake. Realism, as a dominant paradigm of “the long peace”, has been challenged for allegedly failing to predict both the end of the Cold War and the concomitant peaceful transformation of the post-World War II political system. Neorealism, the offspring of realism, has also been subject to similar criticisms. As a response, neorealists claim that after the Cold War, unprecedented transformation in world politics has not been an appropriate test for the theory. For the members of the neorealist school of thought, a single case does not necessarily refute a general theoretical framework. By extension, they have gone so far as to label the end of the Cold War as “merely a single data point.” To make a judgment whether neorealism failed or succeeded in the international relation theory arena requires a thorough examination of the neorealist paradigm. However, this study addresses only the basic premises of neorealism to the extent that they are related to the causes and consequences of systemic change. In this context, this paper attempts to evaluate the predictive power of neorealism regarding the change at the post-World War II political system which ultimately resulted in the end of the Cold War. In other words, the degree of accuracy of neorealism will be evaluated in the context of the end of the Cold War.

## **Neorealism Basic Tenets**

Neorealism revolves around three core assumptions: (1) the contemporary world has anarchic character; (2) states as sovereign units are the main actors in this system; and (3) the distribution of capabilities among units is of utmost importance in the system. The first two factors are held constant while the third one is variable. Thus, the distribution of capabilities plays a central role in this model. Kenneth Waltz, the most prominent advocate of neorealism, has set forth the theory of “structural realism”, which consists of three levels of analysis as a tool for explaining the causes of change in the system. These levels are as follows: the individual level (characteristics of individuals), the domestic level (state structure), and the international level (state system). Waltz defined the first two levels as “units” and the third level as the “structure”. Waltz employed system level of analysis at the expense of unit level analysis. He described the scholars who emphasized unit level analysis as “reductionists”. While reductionists try to formulate a foreign policy theory, he devised

structural realism with a view to creating a theory of international politics. Consequently, isolation of one realm from another is essential for developing a theory of international politics. By extension, international relations theory should not incorporate units and system level analysis. Waltz declares in “Theory of International Politics” that his aim is to distinguish unit level elements from system level elements. In this model, change in structures has an impact on interactions of the units the result emerging from this interaction. Distribution of capabilities is the essence of structural realism. Waltz stated that a good theory of international politics must be systemic since the relationship among states strongly affects governments’ behaviors toward one another.<sup>1</sup> That is why “structural realism” consists of “structures” and “units” at once distinct and connected.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, to develop a systemic analysis abstraction is necessary. As Waltz averred, the theory cannot explain the accidental or unexpected events. Theories deal in regularities and repetitions.<sup>3</sup> Vagaries of domestic politics should be avoided in search of for a systemic theory. For this reason, the elaboration of attributes of units run counter to the basic premises of neorealism. Waltz overemphasized the “structure” at the expense of units. As a result, unit level attributes are overlooked because of overemphasis on the structure. It is at this stage that neorealist failure of prediction emerges.

This model has inherent weaknesses regarding the change. These defining characteristics of system structure are too general to specify the sources of change. Even Waltz admitted that there has been only a single structural change in the international system since the Westphalia Treaty. According to Waltz, this change was the World War II. Given these drawbacks, the peaceful transformation of the system is rendered unexplainable by neorealists. His contradictory judgments about the causes of change in the system led to criticisms about the predictive accuracy of the neorealist paradigm. Waltz held that the anarchic nature of the international system can only be transformed through the change in its structure. Consequently, interactions between units are of little importance to system change. He declared that in the anarchic realm of international relations we need not be concerned with the functions performed by the units.<sup>4</sup> Actions of state derive from the international system.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Long Grove, IL, Waveland Press, 2010, pp. 38-60.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 40-78.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory”, *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 44., no.1, 1990, p. 71. <http://classes.maxwell.syr.edu/PSC783/Waltz44.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

The anarchic environment and distribution of capabilities among states define the international system. Therefore, Waltz underrated considerations of domestic politics and individual attributes in his system-level analysis. Changes in actors' behavior and system outcomes are explained not on the basis of variations in these actor characteristics, but on the basis of changes in the attributes of the system itself.<sup>5</sup> Changes in the distribution of capabilities cause shifts in the systemic structure. Consequently, the structure is the principal determinant of outcomes at the systems level.<sup>6</sup>

Waltz later stated that change in the system results not from the structure but from its units.<sup>7</sup> He noted that some causes of international outcomes occur at the level of interacting units but some causes occur at the structural level of international politics. If one theory allows for the operation of both unit level and structure level causes, then it can cope with both the changes and the continuities that occur in the system.<sup>8</sup> The corollary of this argument is that units affect structures and structures affect units. In the end, both influence international outcomes. The most distinctive feature of this structural model in terms of explanatory power is that the cause-effect relationship between interacting units and outcomes is mutual. The later added that "if we want to explain what the actors will do, in addition to looking at the attributes of the actors, we must look at the constraints that define the strategic setting in which the actors interact. The third image locates causes within the state system".<sup>9</sup> This signifies his inclination toward the structure at the expense of the units. Waltz's emphasis on relative change in the distribution of capabilities in the system of states could be explained as his endorsement of the definite power of the international structure on policy changes<sup>10</sup>. This is the point which evoked most criticism.

The essence of the neorealist paradigm is that only relative change in the distribution of capabilities in the state system brings about system transformation. In this context, the neorealist theory tries to explain the change in the current world political structure by designating Soviet policies as a

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 90-98.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104-111.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40-67.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory*, p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Man, the State, and the War: A Theoretical Analysis*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Keohane, "Neoliberal Institutionalism", Christopher W. Hughes and Lai Yew Meng, *Security Studies: A Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 160.

response to the relative decline caused by its proliferating defense bill and technological backwardness. Nevertheless, neorealists have difficulty proving the existence of a noticeable alteration in the capabilities. Therefore, the causes for the change in the Soviet Union's foreign policy is the essence of an intellectual debate. More specifically, this intellectual debate focuses on whether there is a change in the power of the Soviet Union in relation to the United States and if such a shift is the sole reason for the Soviet foreign policy changes. The relative importance and role of domestic factors vis-à-vis external factors in the process of change is the essence of the dispute between neorealists and their critics. Neorealists have tried to prove that the events proceed smoothly in accordance with the assumptions of neorealist theory which were predicated on the decline in capabilities.

Lebow argues that the Soviet response to decline is not captured by any neorealist theory. At the very least, these theories are underspecified.<sup>11</sup> He argues that the dizzying developments of 1989-1990 are in contravention to neorealist expectations on three accounts.

- (1) Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe,
- (2) The accommodative attitude of the Western alliance,
- (3) The absence of a systematic war.

When the Soviet Union collapsed and the Iron Curtain were willfully opened when the Red Army withdrew from Eastern Europe, it meant rejecting two fundamental neorealist arguments: "that states are lustful for power and that they will protect their own survival at all costs (if necessary through execution of war)."<sup>12</sup>

### **The Second Cold War and Neorealism**

Assumptions of neorealism, regarding the end of the Cold War, resemble those of realism, because neorealism has borrowed the basic tenets of its progenitor. Waltz deemed balance of power as an essential component of

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, "The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism", Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 36. <https://libraryoflights.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/international-relations-theory-and-the-end-of-the-cold-war.pdf>. Also see Richard Ned Lebow, "The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism", *International Organization*, vol. 48, no.2, Spring 1994, pp. 249-277.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Weber, *The International Politics of Russia and the Successor States*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996, p. 342.

neorealism. He noted that if there is any distinctively political theory of international politics, it is the balance of power theory. He asserted that power remains the final arbiter in the international arena. In this context, self-help is inevitably the principal action in an anarchic order.<sup>13</sup> His remarks that “states try to arrest or reverse their decline”<sup>14</sup> smacks of Morgenthau’s age-old axiom that “states seek to gain power, retain the power and expose power.”<sup>15</sup> In response, critics of neorealism maintain that peaceful revolutions of 1989-1990 have no relevance to the basic neorealist axiom that the pursuit of power is the principal objective of states.

The rationality assumption employed by neorealism is based on the link between system structure and actor behavior<sup>16</sup>. The rationality assumption holds that leaders will respond to the incentives or constraints endorsed by political environment. The rationality assumption is used as a tool in accounting for the Soviet Union’s response to its relative decline. As a result, it assumes an essential task in structural realism. Application of this assumption requires that the Soviet Union retreated from its “outer empire” because it perceived its relative decline vis-à-vis the United States. However, the Soviet Union’s disengagement from Eastern Europe has gone far beyond any conception of retrenchment. First, it is antithetical to Waltz’s axiom that “states try to reverse their decline”<sup>17</sup>. Instead of promoting its reign in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union withdrew from its “vital sphere of influence.” Regarding Gorbachev’s foreign policy as a deliberate move, Lebow argues that Gorbachev’s position was no worse than that of Brezhnev.<sup>18</sup> Whereas the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan can be judged as retrenchment, Moscow’s withdrawal from Eastern Europe cannot be viewed as such. The Soviet Union deemed Eastern Europe as an area in which its vital interests were at stake. Moreover, it risked going to war twice in the past over this “informal empire”. Consequently, maintenance of communist regimes was of utmost importance for the Soviet

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, “Emerging Structure of International Politics”, *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 2, Fall, 1993, pp. 44-79.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York; McGraw Hill, 7th ed., 2005, p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> Robert O. Keohane, “Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Behind”, Robert O. Keohane, (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 167. <http://www.ir.rochelleterman.com/sites/default/files/keohane%20neorealism.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Introduction: International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War”, <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~volgy/lebow.doc>, 03.12.2016.

<sup>18</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 40.

Union. However, during 1989-1990 it gave up its strategic space with no gain in turn.

The Soviet retreat refutes another neorealist presumption. Neorealists have taken for granted that the superpowers' self-reliance is more salient in a bipolar world. Therefore, alliances are less important in the bipolar world than in the multi-polar world. Consequently, they attribute Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe to this premise. However, they seemed to have forgotten the two Berlin crises in 1948 and 1958, which brought the two hegemons to the brink of war. In this account, neorealists were dealt a heavy blow. Given the basic tenet of neorealism that system structure defines the behavior of units, the behaviors of units can be regarded as an adaptation to a changing international environment. More specifically, the Soviet Union's retrogressive actions can be interpreted as attempts to fit the changing international structure. However, background exposes the surroundings of this assumption as well. In light of the Cold War's developments, neorealism did not seem to be a sufficient tool in accounting for reversal of the Soviet security concept in Eastern Europe. In other words, the Soviet foreign policy in Eastern Europe is hardly consistent with neorealism.

As for the immediate reason, for the reconceptualization and reformulation of the Soviet security and foreign policy, neorealists maintain that the Soviet Union's retreat is contingent on external pressures. They claimed that the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) compelled the Soviet Union to reconsider and reverse its security policy. This argument is also flawed. SDI was supposed to operate in no less than fifteen years when it was announced by the President Ronald Reagan in 1983. It did not tip the distribution of capabilities overnight. Moreover, this does not indicate that the Soviet Union did not have the capacity to countervail this program. An alternative explanation suggests that measures taken by the Soviet Union to countervail SDI stifled the Soviet economy delivering the final blow to an already stagnant economy. However, evidence suggests that military expenditure continued to consume the same rate of the resource from the economy until 1989. As a consequence, Oye dubbed neorealism "under identified" which cannot be tested with reference to the end of the Cold War.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth A. Oye, "Explaining the End of the Cold War: Morphological and Behavioral Adaptations to the Nuclear Peace?", Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War*, New York, Columbia University Press,

One assumption is that Gorbachev foresaw the decreasing probability of matching the US in the arms race. However, this assumption is also deficient in explaining the adherence of Chernenko and Andropov to the ossified Cold War security concepts. Here the neorealist quandary regarding the negligence of domestic factors and attributes of individuals re-emerges. Stein pointed out that satisfactory explanation of unprecedented changes in the Soviet foreign policy must include individual as well as international and domestic variables.<sup>20</sup>

Waltz claimed that the variations in the distribution of power, in the form of relative decline, cause systemic change. However, the decline in the capabilities of the Soviet Union was relative. Although the Soviet economy was suffering from stagnation for some time, it grew by 2 percent in 1985. When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, he inherited a slowly growing economy, not a collapsing state structure. More importantly, economic deterioration was not the cause but the result of economic reforms. During that period the growth rate of the US economy was almost the same as that of the Soviet Union. As a result, it is difficult to justify the view considering the Soviet foreign policy as a response to the relative decline in the capabilities of the Soviet Union. The neorealist theory is unable to provide satisfactory evidence that the Soviet Union's inability to match the US in the arms race caused a remarkable change in its relative capabilities. Thus, the changes in the international structure could not be determinant in the reconceptualization of the Soviet security policy. It is unsatisfying to explain the changes in the Soviet thinking as a rational adaptation in the face of uncertainty. Otherwise, the neorealist theory seems to be insufficient in justifying the reversal in the Soviet foreign policy from "Brezhnev Doctrine" to "Sinatra Doctrine" sanctioning the former client states to go "their own way" rather than pursuing the savior's path. This doctrine was based on Frank Sinatra song that was used by Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman, Gerasimov, to identify the new Soviet policy of allowing Warsaw Pact nations "do things their own way". With this policy, the Warsaw Pact states discarded "interference in the internal affairs of other countries" and "hegemonism" and promoted "the freedom of choice".<sup>21</sup>

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1996, p. 58. <https://libraryoflights.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/international-relations-theory-and-the-end-of-the-cold-war.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Janice Gross Stein, "Political Learning by Doing: Gorbachev as Uncommitted Thinker and Motivated Learner", *International Organization*, vol. 48, no. 2, Spring 1994, p. 155-183.

<sup>21</sup> John Lenczowski, "The Sources of Soviet Perestroika", 06 July 2011, [https://www.iwp.edu/docLib/20110706\\_SourcesofSovietPerestroika.pdf](https://www.iwp.edu/docLib/20110706_SourcesofSovietPerestroika.pdf), p. 32. 03.12.2016.



Whether individual attributes of statesmen have effects on the system change is another contentious issue. Here we are confronted with the difficulty of “assigning relative weight to domestic versus international factors” when they continually influence one another. Waltz relegated the first image to a trivial stature in his theoretical framework designating actions of statesmen as indeterminate in the process of change. However, critics of neorealist theory gave the utmost importance to the peculiarity of Gorbachev’s leadership that set in motion the forces leading to complete transformation of the world political arena. New thinking, launched by Gorbachev functioned as the intellectual springboard for Soviet domestic and foreign policy changes. Gorbachev’s inductive thinking was the catalyst for change. In response, neorealists maintain that Gorbachev’s role was exaggerated in the system change. They maintain that it was the same man who declared that “we are looking within socialism rather than outside for the answers to all questions.” Until the abortive August 1991 *coup d’etat*, he advocated reformed communism. More importantly, he came to power with a domestic agenda and his priority was not to revolutionize Soviet foreign policy. Rather, his main concern was the revitalization of the economy. Stein, implying that the characters of individuals have a stake in the system-wide change, concludes that as a leader Gorbachev’s thinking mattered.<sup>22</sup> For only the changes in the perceptions of Gorbachev and his inner circle seem to have an explanatory power. Otherwise, neorealism remains inadequate in providing an acceptable account for re-orientation of the Soviet Union towards the “Common European Home” (1987)<sup>23</sup>, which was articulated by Gorbachev when no sign of the thaw in the Cold War was in sight. It is the point at which domestic considerations rise as another candidate for explaining the system-wide change.

### **Neorealism: The End of the Cold War**

The neorealist explanation cannot offer a comprehensive account of precisely why a given state’s institutions decline vis-à-vis competing powers because it intentionally refrained from the unit of level analysis. However, it seemed justified in their argument that “perceived relative decline” was a necessary condition for the adoption of “perestroika” and “new thinking” and the relative decline was connected to the burdens imposed by the Soviet

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<sup>22</sup> Janice Gross Stein, *Political Learning by Doing*.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, London, 1987, pp. 195-196.

Union's international position. Nevertheless, they are unable to explain why the burden, caused by the proliferating arms race, became unbearable after 1985, while the ratio of defense expenditure to GDP remained the same throughout the 1980's. What caused Gorbachev to perceive the international environment differently than Brezhnev did? This is the point of contention within which neorealists could not offer any satisfactory explanation. Reaction to external pressures has been decided by institutions. These institutions, in turn, have been influenced by domestic circumstances. In this respect, Gorbachev's main motivation in encouraging reform in both the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was his grasp of legitimacy crisis in both the Soviet Union and its satellites. As a result, the age-old neorealist maxim that external conditions determine domestic policy choices was rendered bankrupt.

Neorealists revolve around a "vicious circle" from which they cannot disengage. By sticking to the abstract structures and distribution of so-called "tangible" capabilities, they ignored the importance of the individuals and the role of institutions in international system transformation<sup>24</sup>. Neorealism was unable to see the fact that changes in the distribution of capabilities stem from units. The deficiency proved it inept in predicting systemic change. Although the neorealist theory urges us to believe that "perceived decline" or "relative decline" is necessary condition of change, George Bush's announcement that the US should move beyond containment to a new policy of cooperation came a few months earlier than the Soviet withdrawal from its "outer empire" and much before the dissolution of the Soviet Union proper.<sup>25</sup> Given the difficulty of measuring the relative decline in capabilities and degree of rationality of actors and concepts such as the distribution of capabilities are indeterminate to justify the change in perceptive attitudes of leader epitomized by Gorbachev. The world has undergone a historical transformation in which military capabilities did not explain political practice but vice versa. In other words, political practice consisted of actions of individuals and states gave the direction to the system change. By extension, the assumptions of neorealism are unable to anticipate the end of the Cold War. As a dominant paradigm, neorealism has been in need of important modifications. The failure of neorealism in this account signifies the need for emphasis on domestic politics

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<sup>24</sup> Alexander Whyte, "Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism: Born of Same Approach?", *E-International Relations*, June 11, 2012, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/06/11/neorealism-and-neoliberal-institutionalism-born-of-the-same-approach/>

<sup>25</sup> Achilleas Megas, *Soviet Foreign Policy toward East Germany*, New York: Springer, 2015, p. 7.

so as to reflect the role of institutions. This requires the incorporation of beliefs and ideas into theory, which neorealists persistently refrained from doing.

Those who subscribed to the neorealist paradigm took for granted that the US and its allies would exploit the Soviet Union so that it could not recover. To the contrary, the Western alliance offered help to the Soviet Union. The neorealist theory could not appreciate changing parameters. For the first time in the Cold War, the US foreign policy focused more on domestic rather than foreign policy. This raised the questions whether neorealism is well equipped to deal with such an inconceivable transformation. In a matter of years, the world has witnessed a turnaround in superpower relations after the Cold War. Naturally, such a “geopolitical earthquake” could not be foreseen by a paradigm which has clung to ossified concepts of distribution of capabilities and systems level explanations. Having isolated themselves from their intellectual progenitors, like George Kennan, neorealists were left on the sideline in the wake of the turmoil in the world political atmosphere during 1989-1990. Consequently, turmoil in the world political atmosphere rendered this paradigm obsolete.

The existence of a benign international environment was argued as a motivation for the Soviet policy reformulation. Nuclear deterrence, a system level concept, as assumed as having a systemic effect on the Soviet Union leading to the reformulation of the Soviet security and foreign policy. Kenneth Oye claimed that the Soviet Union no longer needed a defensive glacis to protect itself from invasion.<sup>26</sup> He emphasizes the importance of central systemic peace stemming from nuclear deterrence and regards the Soviet response as the morphological adaptation to the nuclear peace.<sup>27</sup> Paul Warnke stated that the Soviet abandonment of Eastern Europe would not have been possible if the elimination of its buffer zone would have presented a serious threat to the Soviet security.<sup>28</sup> The existence of nuclear parity gave the Soviet Union a “sense of security.” Accommodation and retrenchment are a logical adaptation to the changed international environment.<sup>29</sup> Although domestic

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<sup>26</sup> Kenneth A. Oye, *Explaining the End of the Cold War*, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Warnke, “Now New More Than Ever: No First Use”, Charles W. Kegley (der.), *After the Cold War: Questioning the Morality of Nuclear Deterrence*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991, p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Deudney and John Ikenberry, “The International Sources of Soviet Changes”, *International Security*, vol. 16, no. 3, Winter 1991-1992, p. 96. <http://www3.nccu.edu.tw/~lorenzo/Deudney%20and%20Ikenberry%20International%20Sources.pdf>

crisis lies at the bottom, the Soviet policy change constitutes a response to external conditions. Under conditions of central systemic peace, the USSR faced a widening gap between the international distribution of military and the economic strength. This cleavage reached critical proportions and could not be addressed without a radical reversal of the Soviet foreign policy and the fundamental alteration of the post-World War II order. Existing institutional arrangements strained and ultimately broke in 1989.<sup>30</sup> These events have taken place only under conditions of systemic peace. Favorable conditions of systemic peace served as a midwife in this adaptation process.

The neorealist paradigm assumes that system's structure affects the behavior of the units within itself. Therefore, neorealists attribute the change in the behaviors of states during 1989-1990 to nuclear deterrence. However, to assume that the Western encirclement ceased to exist and the Western threat vanished under the shadow of nuclear deterrence means overlooking the conditions under which the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the threat to use of force in Poland in 1980 to keep communist governments in power. Nuclear parity was achieved at the latest in the mid-1960s. Consequently, it was a reality in 1968 as it was in 1989. If the favorable international environment, epitomized by "Mutual Assured Destruction" (MAD) was a facilitating factor in the reorientation of the Soviet foreign policy and reconceptualization of the Soviet security policy, a counter argument maintains that Gorbachev's ascent to power could have resulted in a long-lasting second detente. Instead, it turned out to be a transitory period leading to the collapse of the post-World War II system. Therefore, neorealists have difficulty finding out a "systemic effect" to be applied to the behaviors of the actors. Ikenberry and Deudney challenge this "systemic effect" assumption in the following way: the fundamental source of the Soviet crisis is a mismatch between the Soviet command of political and economic structures and imperatives of advanced industrial production. Nonetheless, his crisis has been exacerbated but not caused by international forces.<sup>31</sup> Lebow argues that the Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev is outside of the neorealist paradigm.<sup>32</sup> To analyze it, we must surpass the limitations of system level analysis and touch on unit level analysis consisting of attributes of individual and domestic politics. In this context, agent-structure relations should be reconsidered. The agent-

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<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Oye, *Explaining the End of the Cold War*, p. 65.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Deudney and John Ikenberry, *International Sources of Soviet Change*, p. 80.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, *The Long Peace*, p. 48.

structure problem is the inevitable result of the system level analysis in the absence of the unit level analysis.

Due to their priority on continuity over change, neorealists took for granted that the world would remain bipolar. For them, bipolarity is more stable than multi-polarity because it depends on the relative capabilities of the US and the Soviet Union. According to Waltz, in international affairs force remains the final arbiter and the criterion for being labeled as a superpower is the “ability to exploit military technology on a large scale and at the scientific frontiers.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, bipolarity emerged not in 1945, but after 1957 when the Soviet Union reached the ability to afflict unbearable harm to the US. It is the result of industrial and scientific capability which conditioned the military capability. Therefore, nuclear weapons are not the cause but the symptoms of superpower status.<sup>34</sup> Waltz asserted that “the Cold War was firmly rooted in the structure of the post-War international politics and will last as long as that structure endures”<sup>35</sup> because bipolarity is a system level concept and will have an effect on the international outcome. This is the variation of basic neorealist tenet: Change follows the alteration in the distribution of capabilities. If the distribution of power, reflected by bipolarity, does not change we should not expect any change in the system. Accordingly, we would have expected the Cold War to continue as long as bipolarity exists. Contrary to this expectation, the events of 1989-1990 caused the end of the Cold War. However, bipolarity, in the sense of Waltz described, continued because the ability to exploit military technology at the scientific frontiers was not influenced by the profound transformation of the world political arena. By all accounts, the change did not follow the direction that neorealists set forth. According to Waltz’s criteria, even though the distribution of power did not change the international system changed.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, neorealists epitomized by Kenneth Waltz insisted that even after communist regimes of Eastern Europe collapsed, the system remained the same because the distribution of capabilities has not changed. Russia still has the ability to afflict unbearable damage to the US. Accordingly,

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<sup>33</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 180.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 181.

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory”, Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, (eds.), *The Origin and the Prevention of Major Wars*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 52.

<sup>36</sup> Annette Freyberg-Inan, *What Moves Man: The Realist Theory of International Relations and its Judgement of Human Nature*, New York: State University of NY; 2004, p. 74.

the international system has been bipolar during the Cold War.<sup>37</sup> This is the *ex-post facto* explanation of the events of 1989-1990 in the face of reality.

The neorealist account of change is useless in that change resulted not from systemic constraints but from alteration in the attributes of one of the units in the system. The change did not emanate from the gap between the relative capabilities of superpowers. Moreover, the bipolar structure of the system did not have any influence on the transformation of the system. Momentous changes that have shaken the world during 1989-1990 demonstrated the difficulty in separation of the structure from the units. Having been oblivious to domestic politics as a determining factor in the world politics, neorealism failed to predict the causes and direction of change in the international system. It did not expect that an alteration in one of the actor's domestic policy would have system-wide consequences. In this respect, John Lewis Gaddis challenges neorealist assumption on causes and direction of the change. He advocated that shifts in the capabilities are not proceeding from the system but from the states within the system.<sup>38</sup> As a result, Gorbachev's reorientation of the Soviet foreign policy and his reconceptualization of the Soviet security policy utterly dismayed neorealist defenders.

### Conclusion

Having failed to prove the existence of any alteration in the distribution of power in the system level and acknowledging unit oriented changes, neorealists defended themselves by reminding Waltz's remarks a theory of international politics cannot predict state behavior or explain the international change.<sup>39</sup> Even the end of the Cold War was inconsistent with neorealism, it cannot have been falsified on this account because international relations theories are capable of only predicting patterns of behavior. They cannot make point predictions. Given that neorealism was proposed as an explanation, not for foreign policy but international politics, it is unjustified to regard it as unsuccessful in failing to predict the end of the Cold War. Waltz states that a theory may help us to understand and explain phenomena and events yet not

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<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *The Emerging Structure of International Politics*, p. 54.

<sup>38</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, "International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War", *International Security*, vol. 17, no. 3, Winter 1992-1993, p. 50. <https://www.stat.berkeley.edu/~aldous/157/Papers/gaddis.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Kenneth Waltz, "Reflections on Theory of International Politics: A response to my Critics", Robert Keohane, *Neorealism and its Critics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 343.

be a useful instrument for prediction.<sup>40</sup> Darwin's theory of evolution predicted nothing. It did help mightily to explain a changing world. A structural theory of international politics identifies general tendencies but will not be reflected in all particular outcomes. We cannot hope to predict specific outcomes.<sup>41</sup> However, it is hardly possible to define the end of the Cold War as merely a prediction of a single event, rather we have to come to terms with the "see changes" in world politics which alter the structure of the international system.<sup>42</sup> John Lewis Gaddis remarks pointed out the desperation in the neorealist intellectual community: Clearly, our theories were not up to the task of anticipating the most significant event in world politics since the end of the World War II.<sup>43</sup> One liability of neorealism is its monocausal focus on the distribution of capabilities.

The Cold War's end without any attendant major war signifies the deficiency of neorealism for not having any theory of peaceful change. Waltz's remark that "in international arena, power remains the final arbiter" epitomizes best the pessimistic mood of neorealism. This intellectual pessimism prevailed throughout the post-World War era, overshadowed any predictions of a peaceful end of the Cold War. Prior to Gorbachev's ascent to power, neorealists has seen the Soviet Union as exclusively an expansionary state and expected the regime to cope with the internal crisis through international aggression. Naturally, their underlying assumption was that any change the Soviet Union would make was intended to secure its power interests. As a consequence, this almost paranoid suspicion blinded them to notice the emergence of the change in the Soviet state structure because they undervalued unit level attributes. Institutional motives, derived from domestic politics and concerns of individuals were underrated or excluded by the end of neorealist paradigm in its system level explanation. Therefore, distribution of capabilities has nothing to do with alleviating the legitimacy crisis in the "Socialist Commonwealth". As a result, they were left on the sideline in the face of the turnaround in the geopolitical map of Europe.

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<sup>40</sup> Colin Elman and Michael Jensen, *The Realism Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 243.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 93.

<sup>42</sup> Isabella Grunberg and Thomas Risse Kappen, "A Time of Reckoning? Theories of International Relations and the End of the Cold War, Pierre Allan and Kjell Goldmann, eds., *The End of the Cold War: Evaluating Theories of International Relations*, Dordrecht, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishing, 1992, p. 105.

<sup>43</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Theories of International Relations Theory*, p. 18.

Crockatt argues that neorealism based as it is on the presumed symmetry of relations between the US and the Soviet Union and on a lack of attention to internal factors assumed too much about the ability of political-military factors to maintain balance.<sup>44</sup> Overemphasis on system level analysis led neorealists to hold motive forces driving state behavior constant and to concentrate on the distribution of power. In the same vein, Fukuyama, referring to realists and neorealists as pessimists, has pointed out that they have been wrong in virtually every prediction – that communism would never try to democratize, the Kremlin would never give up Eastern Europe that the Soviet Union would never break up.<sup>45</sup> Concepts of distribution of power, rational actors and anarchy served as a straitjacket for neorealism. In a self-help system, those factors clogged the possibility of flowering cooperation and created its “Frankenstein” security dilemma. This theoretical background left no room for thinking about peaceful change and accommodation. As a result, reorientation of the Soviet foreign policy and reconpetualization of the Soviet security policy have overtaken those narrow-minded surmises and rendered them outdated, causing a global restructuring. In the wake of the peaceful revolutions of 1989-1990, Scholte declares the failure of neorealism as follows: realism and neorealism did not anticipate the Soviet Union’s voluntary retreat from empire, deep disarmament cuts, the democratic revolutions that swept the world and the sense of global cooperation, integration, and change generally.<sup>46</sup>

Although Waltz acknowledged that the systemic structure reflects the distribution of capabilities within units and any change in the distribution of capabilities cause an alteration in the system structure, he failed to recognize the fact that changes stem from the units. However, he admitted that structure does not account for everything in world politics. To explain outcomes, one must look at the capabilities, the actions, and the interactions of states as well as the structure of their systems.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, “to grapple effectively with the sources of the end of the Cold War, we should not consider international, domestic, or individual factors to the exclusion of the others.”<sup>48</sup> But it is difficult to find a clear-cut answer as to whether Waltz’s above-mentioned

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Crockatt, “Theories of Stability and the End of the Cold War”, M. Bowker and R. Brown, eds., *Cold War to Collapse: Theory and World Politics in the 1980s*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 71.

<sup>45</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of the History and the Last Man*, New York, Penguin 1992, p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> John Aart Scholte, *International Relations of Social Change*, Philadelphia, Open University Press, 1993, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theories of International Politics*, p. 175.

<sup>48</sup> Kenneth Oye, *Explaining the End of the Cold War*, p. 78.



remarks will suffice to countervail the damage wrought by the overemphasis on system level explanations. However, mindful of the fact that history contains no precedent for so striking an example of abrupt but amicable collapse.<sup>49</sup> It seems unjustified to make a point assessment that neorealism is an inept compass in the “uncharted seas”. In addition, in order to reach a conclusion regarding the predictive power of neorealism in the context of the end of the Cold War, it should be clarified which assumption of structural realism is valid in predicting change. Mindful of Kenneth Waltz’s contradictory remarks, there is no easy answer to this question. To answer to this question, if any, will determine the predictive power of neorealism. Until then, the debate over “theoretical indeterminacy” of neorealism is likely to continue.

The shock of the ending the Cold War was a major shift in International Relations that need to be addressed. Waltz identified the transience of the Cold War as a specific instance of international structure: “The Cold War... is firmly rooted in the structure of post-war international politics, and will last as long as that structure endures.” Waltz mostly maintains that neorealism is not refuted by the collapse of bipolarity. Instead, he claims that “contemporary world is merely in a transitional phase and that the world will revert to the structure of power balancing across an anarchic system dictated by the great powers.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *International Relations Theory*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Sean Molloy, *The Hidden History of Realism: A Genealogy of Power Politics*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, p. 124.

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