



# **International Relations in Praxis**

**INR 1204**

***Study Guide***

Department of International Relations  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Colombo

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## CHAPTER SIX

### Non-State Actors in World Politics

#### Learning Outcomes

Students will gain insights into state and non-state actors, their diverse nature, and their influences.

#### Introduction

The nation states were traditionally recognized as the predominant 'actors' in the international system since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. However, non-state actors have begun to play an increasingly important place in world politics since the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

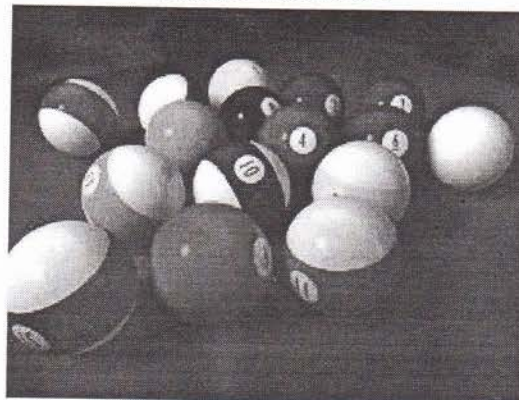
#### Cobweb Model

When examining transnational relations or international relations among states, it is important to understand the actors and the complexities of interactions. Such transnational or international interaction can involve governments (i.e. state actors) or non-government (i.e. non-state actors) organizations and individuals. Non-state actors, according to Nye and Keohane, deal with power and influence and, therefore, do not resemble the 'billiard-ball' model.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Realism</i>	<i>Liberalism/Pluralism</i>	<i>Marxism/Structuralism</i>
Basic Image	'billiard-ball'	'cobweb'	'multiheaded octopus'
Actors	states	states and other	classes
Dynamics	force	complex social movements	economies
Dependent variables	explain what states do	explain all major world events	explain inequality and poverty
Scope of the Study of International Relations	interstate relations	Relations between all actors and market and nationalism	International Relations ...

Source: adapted from Guzzini 1998: 116

According to the international relations theory, Realism sees the sovereign states as billiard-balls, which are of different sizes but actively interact with one another. This view of the international system does not seem to allow for the inclusion of non-state actors.

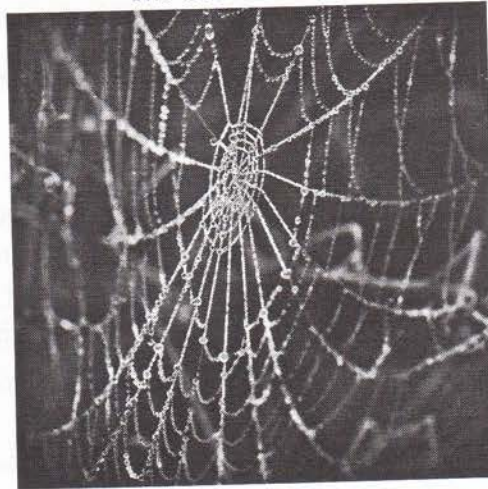


Source: ebscohost.com

Pluralism or Liberalism, as discussed by John W. Burton, on the other hand, views the international system as a cobweb, in which diverse complex connections are tied together.

“Conceive of the human-made world in terms of mosaics of multiple actors at multiple levels, different elements of which are traditionally claimed by the “sovereign” disciplines as their particular domains of discourse: a fractured state of affairs which renders the individual disciplines more a part of the problem than of the solution.” (Sandole 2001)

*The Cobweb Model*



*Source: usegrid.net*

## **Actors**

In the international system, there are 'State' and 'Non-State' actors.

### **Actors in the International System**

“The most significant international actor, the *state* (or country) began to evolve about 500 years ago ... [But] the role of the states, perhaps their very existence, is declining. Other types of actors have always played a number of roles in world affairs and continue to do so. What has changed is the increased number and importance of international organizations, multinational corporations, and other types of international actors. Many, such as the UN, are in the forefront of the struggle for order in the political arena.” (Rouke 1995: 36–37)

### **Non-State Actors**

Non-state actors have existed from the 13<sup>th</sup> century when the Hanseatic League traded in the Baltic Sea. Broadly speaking, non-state actors fall into two categories: individuals and international organizations. But this division is not the full extent of the complexity in the current crop of non-state actors in the international arena. Non-state actors can be both good and bad depending on the context. In 'weak states', criminal and terrorist organizations play a major role. Even in strong states such as the USA, criminal organizations such as drug cartels exist.

### **International Organizations**

The size and scope of international organizations vary. They may be bilateral, sub regional, regional, or global, and they may address relatively narrow or very broad concerns. The powers and duties allocated to international organizations also differ widely. Some international organizations are legally recognized as international actors—and thus are liable for breaches of international legal obligations—while others are not. (www.britanica.com)

## Global Non-State Actors

- ✦ *The Permanent Court of Arbitration or the Hague Tribunal* has been in existence since 1899.

- ✦ *League of Nations* (created in 1919). The first truly international non-state actor, this organization was not very successful. The League of Nations, which had been active from 1920 – 1946, included a National Council, Nations Assembly, Nations Judicial Committee and a Permanent Court of International Justice. However, it lacked power to enforce decisions made.



- ✦ *The Commonwealth of Nations* or the British Commonwealth is global in character in that it includes, as members countries, former colonies of the British Empire. It was founded in 1931. Currently it has 54 members.



- ✦ *The United Nations* or the *UN* (created in 1946). It has been in existence from 1946 onwards and has faced numerous criticisms and praise. The UN Charter is one of the most significant documents relating to international relations. The UN Secretary General is the head of the organization. The UN Security Council is the decision-making body with 15 members, with five of these being the permanent members with Veto Power. They are China, France, Russia, UK, USA. The UN General Assembly has in its membership sovereign nations, each with one vote. Thus, the Third World Countries have used this forum in the past (e.g., NAM, G-77). The UN has a peacekeeping force called the 'Blue Helmets'. The UN also has the International Court of Justice.



- ✦ *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* or *NATO* was created in 1949 during the start of the Cold War rivalry. At one time called North Atlantic Treaty (NAT), this organization became a key part of the collective defense activities. It still plays a major role in the post-Cold War security scenario



- ✦ *The Non-Aligned Movement* or *NAM* came into existence in 1955. (see Chapter Three)

- ▲ *Organization of the Islamic Conference* or the *OIC* started in 1973 and “is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.” ([www.ioc-oci.org](http://www.ioc-oci.org)). The organization has a 57-nation membership in four continents.

## Regional Non-State Actors

There are numerous regional organizations. One from each region is presented below.

- ▲ *Organization of American States* or *OAS* has been active since 1948. OAS has 35 states from North and South America, including Cuba. (<http://www.oas.org/>)
- ▲ *Organization of Central American States* or *ODECA* has been active since 1951. Its primary aim was to “reestablish regional unity in Central America.” ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)).
- ▲ *European Union* or *EU* began in 1958 to end conflicts between France and Germany. It actually began as the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 and included Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, and Netherlands as founder members. It has changed its name over the years from the European Economic Community to European Community to the current European Union. This organization has a Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice. (<http://www.europa.eu>)
- ▲ *Warsaw Treaty Organization* or *Warsaw Pact* began in 1955 but it has ceased to be in existence since 1991.
- ▲ *Commonwealth of Independent States* or *CIS* was formed in 1991 “by Russia and 11 other republics that were formerly part of the Soviet Union” ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com))
- ▲ *Organization of African Unity* or *OAU*, later known as the *African Union (AU)* became active in 1953. It has 53 member states.
- ▲ *Arab League* or the *League of Arab States* came into existence in 1945 and has as its members Jordan, Emirates, Bahrain, Tunisia, Algeria, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and Somalia.
- ▲ *Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)* was founded in 1967 with five members – Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. It has since been joined by Brunei, Vietnam, Lao, Myanmar and Cambodia.



was established in 1985 and has Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka as its members.



### Other Non-State Actors

Non-state Actors also include Multinational Corporations, the International Media, Religious groups, Criminal Organizations, Terrorist Organizations and even Diaspora communities. A brief description of each of these non-state actors is made below.

### Multinational Corporations

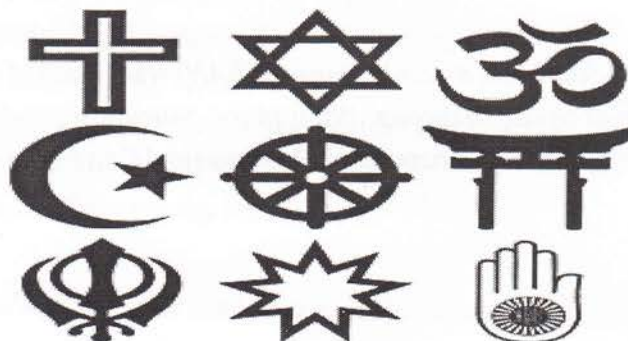
Multinational Corporations have existed since the 17th century when the Dutch East India Company was established.

“Multinational corporations (MNCs) are important transnational agents in the contemporary global political economy. Although they can be viewed as economic actors following the logic of international markets, their activities inevitably arouse questions of national power as well.” (Clark and Chan 1995: 112)

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these corporations have become extremely powerful. They earn a lot of money and their power is vast as they employ people from different countries and can influence leaders. The most famous of these MNCs is McDonalds while a listing of other MNCs has to include car-making giants such as General Motors, Toyota Motor Corporation; food related corporations including Wal-Mart, Nestlé, PepsiCo, Coca-cola; oil industry leaders such as Shell, ExxonMobil; sports apparel corporations such as Nike; entertainment industry heavy-weights such as Disney; and internet search engines such as Google.

### Religious Groups

Religious groups such as the Catholic Church play an important role as non-state actors in the international system. Other than the Vatican, which is recognized even in the UN, there are religious interest groups, religious fundamentalists, and even religious fanatics who continue to influence one or more states. Also, Quakers and Mennonites play a major role in international peace activism.





## Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-Governmental Organizations or NGOs are private, often voluntary, interested and task-oriented organizations. NGOs have consistently worked on transnational issues including: environmental concerns targeted by 'Friends of the Earth International' and Greenpeace; health issues tackled by the Nobel Peace Prize winning 'Doctors without Borders' (also called 'Médecins Sans Frontières' or MSF); justice issues including the International Campaign to Ban Landmines which began with six NGOs and has expanded to 1300 NGOs; and NGOs concerned with human rights (which include Human Rights Watch) and animal rights such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals).



## The International Media

The International Media as a non-state actor fully emerged with the 1991 Gulf War, when CNN broadcasted 'live' from the battlefield. Even though news broadcasted via traditional forms of newspapers and non-traditional means such as television, internet, YouTube, and cell/mobile phones, the media have become more than news-gathering tools and sources for information. Media has allowed celebrities to influence and even shape the direction of events.



## Criminal Organizations

According to Interpol, there were six priority crimes including drugs, financial and high tech-crimes, trafficking of humans, and terrorism. All these are cross-border or 'transnational' crimes.

Definitions of what constitutes organized crime vary widely from country to country. Organized groups are typically involved in many different types of criminal activity spanning several countries. These activities may include trafficking in humans, weapons and drugs, armed robbery, counterfeiting and money laundering. <http://www.interpol.int>

Criminal organizations that go beyond state borders include the Italian-American Mafia and the Russian Mafia which deal with human trafficking and prostitution and the Madellin Cartel and Tijuana Cartel associated with trafficking. They have become part of the global economy.

## Terrorist Organizations and Armed Groups

Terrorism is not a new aspect within countries. However, as an international non-state actor, terrorist organizations have become major players since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most famous of the terrorist organizations has become al Qaeda, an organization established in the 1980s by Osama bin Laden. This organization is a typical international organization with members or 'cells' in different countries. Other terrorist organizations are physically limited to one country though their monetary support base is often international. These include armed groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC, which began in 1964.



## Diaspora communities

Diaspora is a Greek word meaning 'scattering'. Diaspora as a term which refers to people who have left their home country and are residing in a host-country, originated with the Jewish diaspora. It now includes all ethno-religious/ ethno-linguistic people who are forcefully or voluntarily scattered from their country-of-origin. Diaspora has been successful non-state actors since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Jewish diaspora began their quest to create Israel. Diaspora has become a force in their host-country and their home-country.

## Individuals

Individuals as non-state actors are the private citizens or civilians who do not represent any government. They are also called 'supra-empowered individuals who overcome normal citizenship requirements to represent a larger entity. These include religious leaders such as the Pope; philanthropists such as Bill Gates and Richard Branson; activists such as the celebrity Bono or Jody Williams under whose leadership the International Campaign to Ban Landmines received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1997; criminals such as Gaviria Escobar who was the most powerful drug lords and one of the world's richest men in the 1980s and Joaquin "Shorty" Guzman who is currently worth \$1 billion; and terrorists such as Osama bin Laden.

### Model Questions

1. Citing examples, write an essay on what or who is a 'non-state actor'.
2. List countries that joined the UN in the 1960s.
3. In a map, mark member countries of NATO and Warsaw Pact.
4. Why Multinational Corporations are important in International Relations?

**Key Terms**

African Union (AU)

Al Qaeda

Arab League

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

Diaspora

European Union (EU)

Multinational Corporations

Non-State Actors

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Organization of American States (OAS)

Organization of Central American States (ODECA)

