

How the Neo-Realist and constructivist approaches differ over the study of state behaviour in the contemporary international politics?

Introduction

Neo-realism and constructivism are two approaches that are used to study interactions between states in the international arena. For both neo-realism and constructivism; state is the central point of analysis. These two approaches are from the positivist and post-positivist era, respectively. They may have similar level of analysis but these two diverge when it comes to application of their analysis. We see that constructivism follows the interests of a state; whereas a neo-realist approach doesn't provide that path.

NEO-REALISM

a) Definitions

It is the approach of the ^{Emerg} 3rd Great debate of IR and its leading proponent is Kenneth Waltz. In his words

"A theory of International Relations that puts forward the interaction of sovereign states can be explained by the pressures exerted on them by the anarchic structure of the international system, which limits their choices."

(Kenneth Waltz)

Neo realism is further divided into types:-

- (i) offensive Realism
- (ii) Defensive Realism.

a) State as Principal Actor

Neo-realism, unlike classical realism, puts state at the forefront of all decisions. States are the principal actors in all international affairs. Individuals are not counted as actors. States pursue policy that ensure the maximization of national interest. These interests are ticked down to the public/individual.

b) Anarchic International Structure

Neo-realism also hinges on the fact that the international structure is anarchic. Due to lack of a central authority, states pursue a policy of "might is right". Moreover, this creates a trust deficit environment in which states must expand their capabilities through self-help.

c) Balance of Power

Due to the difference of capabilities between each states, every other state tries to pursue ^{policy} of balance of power. This is to ensure that no state is dominant over the itself. This approach also forces the states system to be unipolar, bipolar or multipolar depending on the number hegemon present.

d) Survival as the Primary Goal

Neo realism can be summed up as follows:-

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"Statism for Survival Through Self-Help."
 States in the anarchic international structure

pursue a policy to ensure their security and survival. This is done by self-help and self-reliance. Balance of power and relative gains is ensured by this approach.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

a) Definition

Constructivism can be summed up as

"The structures of human association are determined primarily by the shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by Nature."

(Kenneth Waltz)

Constructivism believes that constructs/identities and perceptions shape up interactions rather than pre-existing material forces (anarchy or cooperation)

b) Identity/Constructs are building blocks of International Structure.

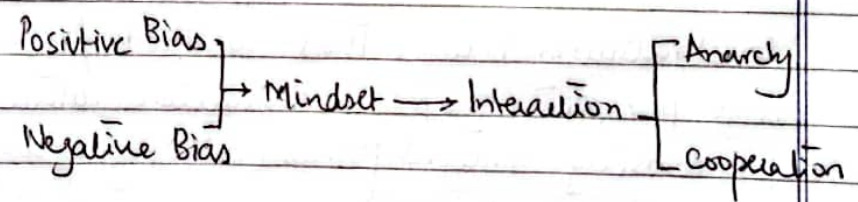
It is the interactions between the institutions that shape up identities. Identities are not a given. They are formed up by countless interactions both at individual and state level. The beliefs, norms or values that each state/individual actor has will shape up the resulting interaction between. These interactions may lead to either anarchy or cooperation.

c) Anarchy or Cooperation As a result of Interactions

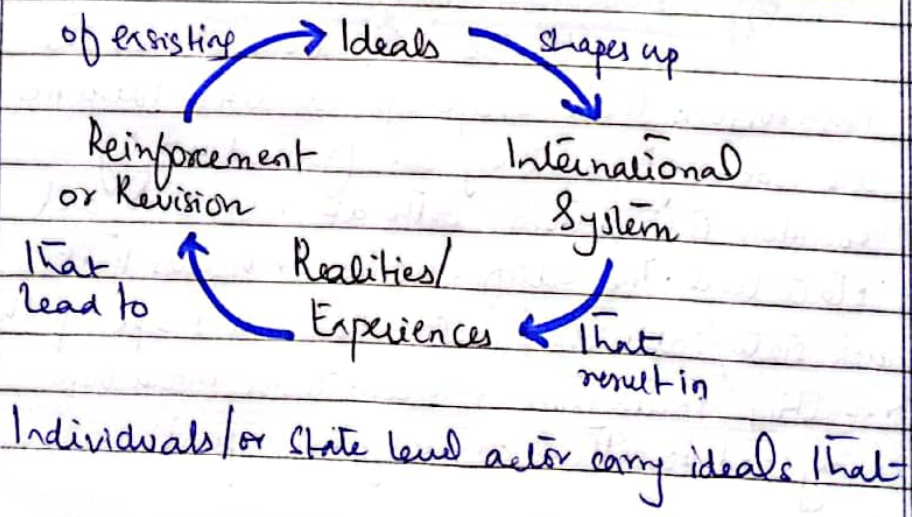
Constructivists believe that the interactions that occur between two actors will lead to either cooperation or interaction. Neo-realists believe that anarchy is just a given, while the same goes for liberals who believe that an cooperation is a given. Constructivists tend to double down on this and say anarchy and cooperation are result of the interactions between actors.

d) Mindsets/Perceptions Dictate Actions

Constructivists argue that mindsets and perceptions play a considerable role in shaping interactions. As every human is innately biased, these biases shape up our perceptions regarding various issues. These biases will tend to lead in interaction creating cooperations or anarchy.



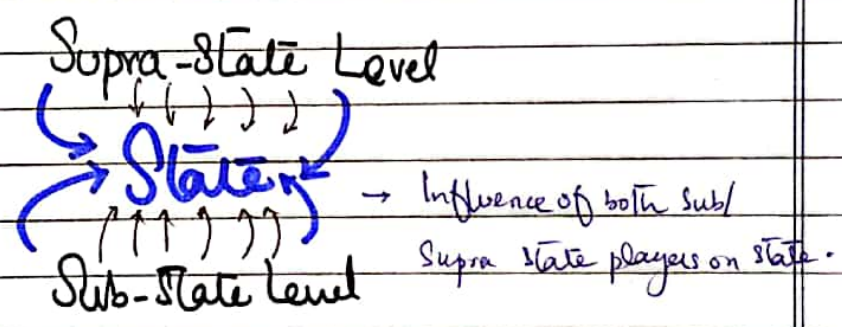
e) International System Loop of State Constructing



c) all the result of pre-conceived bias/notions that were shaped by interactions. These ideals shape up the international structure. The interactions within these structure are the realities/experiences that nations and individual actors have to face. This leads to either the revision or reinforcement of the ideals.

Differences in State Level Behaviour in Constructivism and Neo-Realism

d) Neo-realism defines the state as the primary actor in the international structure. As we discussed before, the state pursues its policies and national interests and the benefits are trickled down the individual level.



e) Constructivism differs on this as it believes that state is a primary actor but the state is influenced by both supra state level actors such as INGO's, IGOs, Police Orders etc. and sub state level actors such as Ethnic Groups, ~~Iran~~ Religious movements etc. Similarly, perceptions play a key role in the identity formation and construct formation of the interaction between the players. Moreover, the interactions between players are a major source of analysis in constructivism. Neo-Realism does not offer this level of depth when

analyzing ~~the~~ behaviours of a state-state interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Constructivism and Neo-Realism are approaches that both converge to a point where they agree that state is a principle actor. However, they diverge when the sphere of influence of other actors on a state is analyzed. Both approaches are used to analyze behaviour of states through different lenses of IR. Some lenses provide a quantum level analysis ^{ie} of their interactions while others focus on the broad picture.