

International Relation

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Q.No1. How do Realism and Social Constructivism each explain the origin and implications of International conflicts? Compare and contrast their perspectives.

1. Introduction

The study of international conflicts has been a central concern in International Relations, with different theories offering distinct explanations for their origins and persistence. Realism views conflict as an inevitable outcome of an anarchic global system where states operate to compete for power and security to ensure survival. In contrast, Social Constructivism argues that conflicts can be resolved by states, as conflicts are not predetermined by material capabilities but are socially constructed through shared ideas, identities, and historical interactions among states. While Realism emphasizes the immutable nature of power politics, Constructivism highlights the potential for change in state behaviour through shifts in norms and perceptions. By analyzing the underlying origins of conflicts and their broader implications for the global structure, these theories contribute to a deeper understanding of how global order is created, challenged, and transformed over time.

2. Overview of the Realism and Social Constructivism.

Theories of International Relations

Realist Theory (Morganthau, Waltz, John Mearsheimer)	Social Constructivism (Alexander Waltz, Nicholas Onuf)
— International System is anarchic	— Socially constructed world order
— Power Politics	— Identities and Norms
— Self-help System	— Ideas shapes national interest

3. Origin of Conflict: Realist Perspective

3.1 Anarchic International System

Realism argues that the system of the world is anarchic, the international politics is a struggle for power, driven by states seeking survival in anarchy. Ultimately, this originates conflict among the states so that the states can maximise their power.

3.2 Security Dilemma

In the global system, states arm themselves to ensure survival, causing other states to feel threatened, resulting in arms race and potential war. Hence, the security dilemma ignites the fire of conflicts in the international system.

3.3 Problem of Cheating

In an anarchic international system, states fear that other may renege on treaties or commitment to gain military, economic, or strategic gain advantages. This lack of trust fosters suspicion, and often leads to escalation into conflict.

3.4 Problem of Relative Gains

States are highly sensitive to what their rivals gain in comparison. In international system if one state perceives that another side gains a strategic or military edge, it abandons cooperation and resort to aggressive measures to restore balance. This problem of relative gain becomes a source of conflict.

4. Implications of International Conflicts: Realist Perspective

4.1. Persistent Rivalries

In an anarchic system, there is absence of central authority, this absence of central authority results in recurring wars and security competition.

4.2. Limited Role of Institutions

Global organizations like the UN or NATO cannot effectively prevent conflicts because state sovereignty and national interest weigh down institutional rules and moral principles. For instance, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan and Armenia repeatedly engage in clashes.

over territorial claims, demonstrating realist principles of self-help behaviour and power centric dispute resolution in an anarchic system.

4.3 Power Politics over cooperation

Realist argue that even peaceful negotiations are often temporary, as states prioritise relative power advantages over long term stability.

5. Origin of Conflict: Social Constructivism Perspective

5.1 Hostile Identities

Social constructivism theorist argues that conflicts stems from socially constructed enmity, fear, and mistrust. Due to rival identities and ideological conflict, the states indulge in disputes.

5.2 Shared Understanding of Threats

~~The meaning attached~~ Constructivists emphasize that anarchy is not fixed; it is "what state makes of it". State intercepts interprets threats based on their social relationship, meaning that perception of danger is socially constructed, not determined solely by military capabilities. For example: "500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons," ~~not because~~ says Alexander Wendt, meaning that the number of weapons doesn't matter but the meaning attached to these weapons matters because it

radiates the relationship and identities between the states

5.3 Role of shared Norms:

Conflicts are also sustained by violation of shared norms among the states, such breaches of non-proliferation or humanitarian principles create tensions and conflicts.

6. Implications of International Conflicts: Social Constructivism Perspective

6.1 Conflict is not inevitable: Role of Agency & Structure

The Constructivist argues that agency (states) and structure (the international system of ideas, norms, and interactions) are mutually constitutive. States have the ability to change these patterns by the patterns of conflict by adopting new beliefs, engaging in dialogues, and building cooperative norms. This means that conflict is not inevitable; the rivalry can turn into cooperation by reducing the chances of conflict.

6.2 Norm Building

Social constructivism argues that international institution and diplomacy plays a crucial role in shaping state's national interest. The norms define what is considered acceptable among the states, encouraging cooperation, trust, and peaceful dispute resolution. Over time, consistent engagement through institutions can transform rivalries into friendships.

making conflict less likely. For instance, the transformation of post WWII Germany from a militaristic state to a pacifist, cooperative actor in Europe illustrates how identities and norms can change over time, reducing conflict potential.

7. Conclusion

Both Realism and social constructionism provide valuable insights into the origins and implications of international conflicts, yet both theories approach the issue from fundamentally different angles.

Realism views conflicts as structurally inevitable, driven by anarchic system and power politics, leaving a little room for transformation.

Social Constructionism, in contrast, emphasizes that conflicts are socially constructed phenomena, suggesting that changes in ideas, identities, and shared norms can foster cooperation and peace.