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Realism, anarchy and cooperation

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“Government and co-operation are in all things the laws of life; anarchy and competition the laws of death”. -
John Ruskin, Unto This Last (1862)

Abstract

Realism starts with states as the primary actors in the international system. Anarchy is the ordering principle of the international system. The anarchic principle allows realism to present a pessimistic analysis of the prospects for international cooperation and of the capabilities of international institutions. International anarchy fosters competition and conflict among states and inhibits their willingness to cooperate even when they share common interest. Liberal institutionalism came as a major challenger to realism. Historically appearing in its three successive presentations-functional integration theory in the 1940s and early 1950s, neo-functionalist regional integration theory in the 1950s and 1960s, and interdependence theory in the 1970s argued that international institutions can help states to cooperate. Thus, compared to realism, these earlier versions of liberal institutionalism offered a more hopeful prognosis for international cooperation. Also, provide an optimistic assessment of the capacity of institutions to help states achieve cooperation. Neo-liberalism, even accepting and retaining various realist principles, advocates the possibilities of cooperation and possible capacity of international institutions in this regard. Despite the existence of an anarchic world order, states do cooperate. No state would be able to live on its own or in isolation because of the simple concept of interdependence. My attempt is to look into the question of how far is the realist anarchic conception problematic in attaining cooperation in international system. Methodology may include following and reviewing the primary and secondary resources. Interview with eminent professors (on campus) will also be helpful.

Key words: Neo (realism), Neo (liberalism), Anarchy, Cooperation.

Introduction

Realism starts with states as the primary actors in the international system. Anarchy is the ordering principle of the international system. The anarchic principle allows realism to present a pessimistic analysis of the prospects for international cooperation and of the capabilities of international institutions. International anarchy fosters

competition and conflict among states and inhibits their willingness to cooperate even when they share common interest. Liberal institutionalism came as a major challenger to realism. Historically appearing in its three successive presentations-functional integration theory in the 1940s and early 1950s, neo-functional regional integration theory in the 1950s and 1960s, and interdependence theory in the 1970s argued that international institutions can help states to cooperate. Thus, compared to realism, these earlier versions of liberal institutionalism offered a more hopeful prognosis for international cooperation. Also, provide an optimistic assessment of the capacity of institutions to help states achieve cooperation. Neo-liberalism, even accepting and retaining various realist principles, advocates the possibilities of cooperation and possible capacity of international institutions in this regard. Realism sees world politics as much more conflictful than does neoliberal institutionalism. Despite the existence of an anarchic world order, states do cooperate. No state would be able to live on its own or in isolation because of the simple concept of interdependence.

Neo (realism) and Neo (liberalism)

Realism has dominated international relations theory at least since World War II. Anarchy, the realist assumption, fosters competition and conflict among states and inhibits their willingness to cooperate. Anarchy is not chaos; it is an ordering structure in which participants can seize and defend resources without regulation from above. Common goals attainment (or cooperation) is precluded by the non-existence of the centralized international authority. States, being sovereign entities, cannot cede ultimate control over their conduct to any supranational sovereign, and they cannot guarantee adhering to their promises. Realism gives least, or no, importance to the institutions and their usefulness in maintaining cooperative relations between and among states. However, liberalism came as a challenge to the realism and the pessimistic and gloomy picture it presented about international relations. Also, liberalism emphasized the importance and effectiveness of institutions in making cooperation between states possible. Towards 1970s the conflicts and tensions evolved reaffirmed the realistic propositions and undermined the liberal institutionalism. However, existence of such tensions and conflicts didn't collapse the system; some inter-state cooperation could still be seen. This led to the emergence of new upgraded form of liberalism, which came to be known as neo-liberalism. Neo-realism and neo-liberalism seem similar in so far as both accept and support the existence of anarchy in international system. However, neo-liberalism postulates that cooperation is possible under anarchy and institutions have an important role in this regard.

Anarchy and cooperation

Realist assumption of anarchy is central to theories of cooperation among states. With no central authority to enforce international agreements, states are tempted to exploit each other and by the fear of being exploited. Realism sees world politics as much more conflictful than does neoliberal institutionalism. For realists, world politics is a continuing if not an unrelenting struggle for survival, advantage, and often

dominance. Neoliberals do not deny the existence of cases of extreme conflict, but they do not see them as the entire or even a representative picture of world politics. In many cases and in many areas, states are able to work together to mitigate the effects of anarchy, produce mutual gains, and avoid shared harm. Neo-liberalism believes that states are atomistic actors arguing that states seek to maximize their own individual absolute gains and are indifferent to the gains achieved by other states. Neo-liberalists suggest that cheating impedes cooperation among the rational egoistic states; however, international institutions can help overcome this barrier. Neo-liberalism negates the realists' centrality of 'state' as the primary actor. New actors have emerged on the scene which play an effective role in the international realm and may include the likes of specialized international agencies and their technical experts, labor unions, political parties, trade associations, and supranational bureaucracies, multinational corporations and transnational and trans-governmental coalitions. States are no more the only unitary, rational and deciding actors. Modern states are characterized by the 'multiple channel access' which has weakened the grip of central decision makers on the foreign policy.

States are becoming less concerned about power and security. Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destructions have made war very costly and states always hesitate to use them for their exceptional destructive power. On the contrary, increasing economic contacts and relations among states have made them more interdependent and help them in the attainment of such national goals as growth, full employment, and price stability. The democracies are becoming welfare states more oriented more towards economic growth and social security and less oriented towards power and prestige.

For neo-liberals states are faced with mixed interests and situations in an anarchic system and try to define things using Prisoner's Dilemma. In such a game, each state prefers mutual cooperation (CC) over mutual non-cooperation (DD). However, each state prefers successful cheating (DC) to mutual cooperation (CC) and mutual defection (DD) to avoid being victimized by another state's cheating. So, the scheme is changed to DC>CC>DD>CD. However, liberals stress the existence of countervailing forces by which states keep their promises, resolving the Prisoner's Dilemma. Liberals also argue that states may cooperate on conditional bases and may make use of tit-for-tat strategy. Also, cooperation is more and more possible in iterated games, so iteration strengthens cooperation as compared to one shot game. Reciprocity, extended time horizons, and reduced verification and sanctioning costs help evolve conditional cooperation in the anarchy and international institutions play a vital role to this end. International institutions reduce verification costs, create iterativeness, and make it easier to punish cheater. Keohane and Axelrod assert that "international regimes do not substitute for reciprocity; rather, they reinforce and institutionalize it. Regimes incorporating the norm of reciprocity delegitimize defection and thereby make it more costly".

Conclusion

Summing up the debate, I come to conclude that cooperation is feasible even under anarchy and international institutions can help to attain such cooperation among states. I would like to wind up with John Ruskin's who rightly uttered: "As an enemy rather than an ally of true freedom, competition is not our friend. To live and to flourish, it is the lost art of cooperation that we need to cultivate".

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