

Ashley

Zachary Zwald

Christine Bunting

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Security Dilemma & Cooperation

Ever since the beginning of the human race, interaction with others has always been crucial and unavoidable. In addition the development of relations has also played an important role in the human race. Good relations can lead to cooperation and compromises while bad relations can lead to war and conflict. This holds true to not only human beings, but nation states as well. In the world today interactions between different nation states is crucial as technology and time has enable different nations to form relations. However, not everybody agrees that cooperation can be achieved as security and a nations personal interests supersede any other issue. In fact different theories offer separate explanations as to whether or not the security of a nation prevents cooperations. Neorealists would argue that the security of a nation is more important than maintaining good relations with other states. On the other hand Constructivists believe that other factors are more important in building good relations than the security of a nation. Similarly Neoliberals focus more on political economy and others issues such as human right and the environment, still the security of a nation is taken in consideration as well. Because the security of a nation is so important, some theories such as Neorealism place security above international cooperation, however other theories including Neoliberalism and Constructionism know place the importance of international cooperation above security.

The level of analysis a theory is based on provides much information as to whether or not

they believe that security hinders cooperation. Neorealists follow the state-system level of analysis based on the theory created by John Spanier. In this theory Spanier declares that “each state is part of the system, and each is the guardian of its own security and independence” (Spanier 22). This level of analysis creates tension amongst different states as they view each other as enemies. Neorealists believe that states are the only important actors in the international system. For these reasons Neorealists place much importance in security and reject cooperation between states as this can only be seen as a threat. Neoliberals believe that the state is a main actor, yet they are not the only actor. Professor Zwald explains that International Organizations as well as nongovernmental organizations are also actors according to the neoliberal perception, therefore the notion of self-help is moderated. Because these organizations are able to come up with a set of rules and laws, it allows key actors to arrive at common interests and cooperation. Constructionists on the other hand believe that states were at one point the main actor, however over time they no longer view states as the main actor. Instead they believe in “creating institutions...internalizing new understandings of self and other, of acquiring new role identities” (Wendt 417). Through the process of socialization the constructionist theory is open to changes and they believe that cooperation does not have negative effects.

The degree of importance a specific theory places in anarchism is also very important in creating a self-reliant notion. This notion determines if security issue deters states from cooperating with one another. Neorealists are strong advocates of the self-help notion, therefore they place of the security of a state above any other issue. This means that without any sense of trust, states can only rely on themselves for protection as explains by Mearsheimer, Anarchy creates two main problems: Distrust and Self-Reliance (Mearsheimer 12). This dependence on anarchy only motivates states to be aggressive towards other states as they believe this is the best

way to gain more power. Neorealists and Neoliberals share similar views on anarchy, since they believe that a state is self-interested. However, according to professor Zwald, Neoliberals have a more moderated view on the self-help system. Liberalism is based on the theories of John Locke who believed that man's ability to reason opens room for cooperation which can in turn please every party. In the Neoliberal theory, states act very similar to their human counterparts. With their ability to be more rational, states are more open to cooperation. Constructionist's social theory points out that the way a state acts towards another state is based on a state's identity (Wendt 397). In other words anarchy is a point of consensus in which states use their cognitive processes to determine the behavior and reaction of other states. For constructionists the identity formation is focused on the preservation of security of the state. The Security is not relevant in the identity of a state, therefore does not hinder cooperation in the Constructionist theory.

A state's perception on Relative Gains versus Absolute Gains are also important in determining whether or not they are willing to cooperate. Neorealists believe that Relative Gains are more important than Absolute Gains. Because Neorealists are more concern with the security of their own state, they do not see any profit out of cooperating with other states. Mearsheimer states "competition for security makes it very difficult for states to cooperate. When security is scares, states become more concerned about relative gains than absolute gains" (Mearsheimer 44). When the security of a nation is weak, Neorealists claim that it is best to avoid absolute gains even if this means gaining more absolute economical gains. Neoliberals on the other hand have a more moderated view on relative gains. Instead they strongly promote interdependence between different states. Instead of dispensing all their resources on security they believe that military allies should "actively seek interdependence to provide security" (Keohane 9). The big difference between Neoliberals and Neorealists is that Neorealists hold strong insecurities in human nature,

while Neoliberals are more able to use to reason and be more trusting which gives them the ability to cooperate more than Neorealists. Constructionists are not concerned with either relative gains or absolute gains rather they worry less about “short-term survival and relative power and can thus shift their resources accordingly” (Wendt 415). Constructionist focus more on behavior and they believe that they are forms of cooperation that are important than the security dilemma.

While Neorealism places the importance of national security above international cooperation, Neoliberal and Constructionists can reason the importance of international cooperation. There are many factors that determine whether how important the security of a nation really is, including anarchy, state-system, and absolute vs. relative gains. Interaction amongst nations has become unavoidable with the turn of the new century and with it the importance of cooperation has grown.

Works Cited

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