

Reading summary

Business



The article's main idea is that the system of anarchy within which states exist and interact with each other impacts on their identities as well as their interests, thereby determining them. Under this system of anarchy within which states exist, there are specific factors that have the potential to effect change on state identities. These factors can be best studied through a combination of several theoretical approaches. State interests and identities should not be taken merely as they are. There are many factors that affect state identities and interests, in an anarchical system, and all of them must be studied through a combination of theoretical approaches.

State interests and identities are dependent variables shaped by the dynamics that define the anarchical system. Consequently, according to the author, "we need a combination of neo-liberalism and constructivism".

Under the system of anarchy, states' identities and interests are transformed by the institution of sovereignty, evolution of cooperation and by efforts to transform selfish identities into collective ones. However, anarchy is not responsible for creating self-help identities. Instead, it is the behaviour of a state that would make others respond, thereby transforming their identities. Still, the already existing identities would determine the potential and direction of a new change in state identities.

For example, some theories would have predicted the disappearance of NATO once the Soviet Union's threat vanished. Instead, the collective identity of NATO persisted. The author's idea that the anarchical system within which states thrive is responsible for transforming their identities is convincing. The anarchical system permits a state to pursue its interests.

The resulting actions of the state culminate in the transformation of its own identity.

Consequently, as other states in the system try to respond to the behaviour of one state, their identities are also transformed. The evidence used by the author to support this is convincing because the collective identity that NATO entails has persisted long after the end of Soviet Union's threat. Also, a combination of neoliberalism and constructivism approaches, as proposed by the author, is necessary in the study of how the system affects state interests and identities. The limitations of one theoretical approach are addressed by the strengths of the other approach.