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The Commonwealth of Independent States. A Constructivist approach to a Neo-realist construct

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Abstract: International relations have experienced different manifestations over time, that states had in certain periods or in relation to other similar entities. Scholars tried to establish a vocation for each type of attitude that states have setting theories that can explain more or less behaviour in international relations. International organizations also play a significant role, either having inherited attitudes that perpetuate or because they manage to draw new trails to follow, thus, variations in behaviour in the international system.

Keywords: organizations, neo-realism, constructivism, security complex

Introduction

THIS PAPER PRESENTS THE *COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES (CIS)*, an organisation considered mainly a legacy of the former USSR, with no credibility among other states or organisations, but strongly anchored in its own policy, which makes it probably a long term agreement of its members. The impact of their decision is reflected in international relations and in the regional security, based almost on a common policy around the interest of Kremlin. The dialogue between the members of this organization and the rest of Europe has been often vague, with no major commitments, and any attempt to overcome organisational policies is seriously criticised by other members and often repressed. In this regard, it can be listed cases of Ukraine or Republic of Moldova, which, in their attempts to get closer to the European Union, have had criticism within CIS.

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The importance of this organisation is given by the role it plays in regional level, in other words a Russia's attempt to keep control of these states through an appearance. During the Cold War the realist theory dominated the International Relations mainly because of the American-Soviet rivalry. Being a Darwinian approach to international relations, realist theory has managed to maintain a certain level and particular value, for the mechanism of the international system. What determined USSR member states to coexist on common principles, was actually the need to be in an alliance, to establish concepts that overcome neo-imperialist obstacles in the balance of power of a bipolar international system.

Thus, not only were held by political ideologies but a need to dominate international relations, as represented a counterweight in the international system. However, to what extent these states could remain in close cooperation after the fall of the Iron Curtain, under the principles set by the realist paradigm? Both Realism and Liberalism failed to anticipate the future of the international system, but the constructivist approach made various statements regarding concepts as common security, focusing on ideas and the capability to change by shaping beliefs and interests. A constructivist approach to the CIS is more than necessary, as it may explain how these former states of the USSR, which embraced concepts of Realism, can fail or not, to show, at least in appearance, the need to change an overused theory. We do not talk particularly about their ability to adapt to new international developments, but their ambition to establish for the future preservation of common principles.

This paper attempts to demonstrate to what extent the organisation manages to learn the principles of Constructivism, and whether these are successful in its application. Furthermore, I try to prove whether there is enough data to rule in favour of such a theory applied to the CIS, if there are common values, or just proximity that impugn certain behaviour. For this matter, I will consider scenarios that led to the formation of The Commonwealth of Independent States, how it managed to achieve its aims or if there is any future of this organisation. Not be neglected, component of regional security being the main force Eurasian security policy.

The conclusions are trying to reach on security regional complex, and to what extent this concept is applicable to the CIS. Covering an evolutionary line by presenting the main elements defining neo-realism and how it has helped to strengthen commonalities between the members of the CIS, go through the next step by analysing the applicability of constructivist approach and how it comes to responding the way that the member states of CIS, after dissolution of the USSR, tried and succeeded to some extent to keep the same format. From these considerations will be dotted elements of regional security complex, and the extent to which it conforms to the construction of the CIS.

As research tools in this analysis, I used historical and contemporary papers, interpretation being made on the basis of comparative and interpretative methods based on case studies and concepts developed by scholars in periodicals, and also from web sources of institutions of interest. This paper uses methods and techniques of research in the field of history, International Relations and legal sciences, through detailed analysis of articles and papers, especially those occurring in large schools in this domain, which were clearly parallel views, assumptions and clarifications essential in defining and developing this work.

A Neorealist foundation

In the context of the 1970s and 1980s, there was a return to realist theory motivated by the liberal trans-national momentum characterised by phenomena such as economic globalisation and interdependence (see [Keohane and Nye 1977](#)). Thus, historical events such as the Soviet attack on Afghanistan in 1979, ideological and geopolitical struggle against the United States and the "Empire of evil", political-religious revolution in Iran, the war against Iraq and U.S. hostage crisis resulted ([Baylis et al. 2014](#)), determined the Realism followers to admit that relations between states are most important, because they cannot regulate the actions of all actors involved. While not denying states the ability to relate to trans-national relations they were significantly decreased its importance ([Keohane and Nye 1981](#)).

Theorising the direction of neo-realist theory was due to the work of [Kenneth N. Waltz \(1979\)](#) in "Theory of International Politics", where the author defines political structures in terms of frame, defining external behaviour of the states and internal implications. Thus, the first is the organisational principle ([Waltz 1979: 89](#)) in International Relations, characterised by a lack of order, the presence of anarchy, in contradiction with the internal hierarchy of states and also their ability to shape the international system as required, such as in an economy system. The second principle relates to the functions of units in the international system ([Waltz 1979: 93](#)), namely the states performing in an anarchic system, which instigate them to cooperate. However, even if the states functions are similar, they differ as units in the international system, each trying to carry out their own functions and interests. This leads to the third principle: distribution capabilities ([Waltz 1979: 97](#)); as pursuing their own interests, their place in the international system is in terms of power and methods of gaining and exercise it, that is inevitably leading to a multi-polar power international system. Another neorealist, [John Mearsheimer \(2013, but see also 2018\)](#), questions this theory to foreign policy, providing a structural theory foundation with offensive character, unlike defensive position

promoted by Waltz, the idea that the 'units' want to maximize and expand the power not only to maintain, risking further conflicts.

Since the anarchy of the international system is superior to its units, international political scene as coercion and violence, never changes, so neorealist method tries to identify the main ahistorical laws of evolution (Hobson 2000). Neorealism encourage the use of econometrics and quantitative studies, focusing on the international system (which can be hierarchical or anarchic) rather than international relations. This implies that states should always be careful how power is distributed in the international system in order to be concerned about their safety (Waltz 1979). Unipolarity is the least likely global configuration as international policy requires balancing power and balance of threat, according to Stephen Walt, in which states are no longer guided by abstract calculation but by the perception of threat felt in the international system from other actors (Walt 2002). According to Neorealism, states tend to prioritise the relative gains remaining in international politics the highest form of political expression, despite the phenomena of globalization and interdependence, as the state is a unitary actor and indivisible, whose only interest is military survival. For Waltz, "states that feel insecure must ask how the gain will be divided. They are compelled to ask not 'Will both of us gain?' but 'Who will gain more?'" (Waltz 1979: 105). That's why states have higher capacity than agencies, because their internal variations do not exceed decisive nature of anarchy, but to follow international competitive environment for survival (Hobson 2000).

Nonetheless, as any such theory, Neo-realism has suffered criticism, mainly because it has limitations, especially inapplicability in some cases in the international system. Thus, even if the claims that there cannot be a unipolar power, especially promoting the existence of multipolar power, Neo-realism seems to ignore the actual effects of globalisation and interdependence, that the international system is experiencing. A good example would be that in the present age there is a tendency in community development security, regional integration and economic interdependence, so that the applicability of this trend is only in the periphery of the international system of states on issues such as Iran, Korea North, Pakistan, Syria etc. There are in the world war zones and zones of peace, especially where states succeed during large periods of time, to maintain a practice of liberal ideas, democratic societies, free market etc. exceeding neo-realism paradigms. These "anomalies of the neorealist system" cannot be explained by theorists, as they underestimate the ability of states to promote change (Rathbun 2008: 294-321).

Morals and rules also may be important for the structure of the international system through promotion or abolition of values that were formerly habits. Realism does not take into account the fact that currently

there are more peaceful than militaristic states, so one of the major criticisms is that neo-realism focuses exclusively on military security, given that there are countries joining to create complex interdependencies of cooperation, which can cause other players to behave differently (see [Buzan and Hansen 2016](#)). Therefore, neo-realism is more appropriate for periods of conflict and war, or just to areas where such events are felt and now those areas are rare and tend to adapt to international system promoted by globalization and interdependence.

Thus, the post-Cold War period allowed the organisation and establishment of an organisation on neo-realistic backgrounds. CIS being an organization made up of former Soviet Union member states had the necessary structure to develop institutional and organisational collaboration. However, as we have shown above, neorealism fails to justify its functionality in peacetime, so organizations such as the CIS have seen themselves lose their identity and functionality. At the same time, following Fukuyama's explanation, liberalism succeeded to defeat both fascism and communism in the last century, but nowadays "there was no viable alternative left standing" ([Mearsheimer 2018](#)). The post-Cold War constructivist theory has another approach to the international system and international relations ([Buzan 2014](#)).

The constructivist approach

The collapse of the USSR itself led to significant changes in the international system, such as theories that define relationships and international scene were faced criticism because they failed to demonstrate or to predict this fundamental change. The wave of critics attacked the theories of International Relations in their essence questioning their very existence and ability to be able to formulate clear theories about the international system, given the permanent changes and surprising. As [Griffiths \(2007: 63\)](#) emphasised, we could notice in International Relations community an inability to anticipate neither the fall of the Berlin Wall not the collapse of the Twin Towers. This fact demands to reconcile the discipline assumptions with a "more complicated and less state-centric environment in which global politics is now played out". In this respect, the analytical framework built by constructivists emphasise a leading influence of non-material factors on world policies but also their reshaping ability challenges the researcher to seek for different theoretical approaches.

In this context, constructivist approach comes to surprise critics in a coherent, trying not only to criticize but to bring a new vision of international relations theory. The emergence of Constructivism is determined by four

factors: first constructivist theory established that the wave of rationalist critics fail to observe international system because it essentially 'blinded' by critical and theoretical analysis and fails to make a substance on international relationships. Another was the determination of the end of the Cold War, which paved the way for new ways of explanation and ways the international system can be explained in depth. These issues were fully supported by the fact , that once the Cold War ended , and analysts and theorists in the field have changed , leaving room for new people more open -minded and with a broader perspective in explaining and reasoning functioning of the international system (Reus-Smith 2005: 195). Thus, this theory discussed more serious aspects of the social environment that greatly influence the international system. By doing so they wanted to put more in mind that traditional similarities, linguistic, folkloric, historical and cultural influences are those determining relations between states near them, or rather how they confront their differences.

In this respect, it is estimated that the Constructivism envisages more ideas role in the construction of social life, but especially the social nature of agents or subjects. To answer these questions, it is envisaged to use a holistic methodology, and not one that has the character of individuality (Adler 2013: 114-116). One of most exhaustive explanation the this approach has been given by Emanuel Adler, when he underlined that Constructivism is "an IR theoretical and empirical perspective that, building on the other two layers, maintains that IR theory and research should be based on sound social ontological and epistemological foundations. IR constructivism has led to new and important questions, for example, about the role of identities, norms and causal understandings in the constitution of national interests, about institutionalization and international governance, and about the social construction of new territorial and non-territorial transnational regions" (Adler 2013: 114).

Considering all these aspects, it is essential to develop a theory of International Relations and a better understanding of the international system, that approaches one essential aspect of states identity in defining how they can, want, need or try to maintain relations with other entities (Thies 2002: 149-151). This causes an important aspect to consider how the actors and subjects interact. How ideas occur between these subjects, in this case, states fail to interact, to know and be able to capture the main connections and relationships with others similar (Ishiyama and Breuning 2011: 4-7). Constructivists consider that the structure of relations between actors is based precisely on the idea that the identities of them are unable to establish relationships. More important is the aspect that these relations and especially properties keep evolving over time (Reus-Smith 2005: 197). Thus, subjects not

only have these common identities, but should keep and bring them permanently to a higher level.

One of the main concepts to be applied when discussing about CIS is the regional security complex. It was developed over time by establishing the general criteria that can identify, define and develop such a concept. First regional security complex can be seen as a structure or network of member interdependence creates a security point of view, to the extent that it creates a dependency between the security mechanism to protect the interests of all internal (Lake and Morgan 1997: 25-26). This may be manifested by overlapping multiple items that fail together to make a regional structure between its subjects:

- Perception between the member states that they form a region, but the perception from the outside, from other players about the existence of this.
- To have a geographic proximity between the members of such a structure.
- Evidence of distinction to the overall system in general, or other similar entities.
- Ability and interactions: clear, concrete and viable between those states which denote the interdependence created and exist within the structure.
- Vicinity of economic, cultural, traditional, linguistic, etc. (Lake and Morgan 1997: 25-26).

However, we can say that when third countries outside the states create similar links within the region, there is a security system penetration of these (Buzan and Waever 2013: 32-36). Therefore, constructivist approach establishes that the functioning of an organisation is not only determined by interests and maximizing power, but can also be achieved through the awareness, capitalisation and implementation of common policies, economics, cultural exchanges. This presupposes that an organization such as the CIS can have a constructivist approach, precisely because its establishment was also allowed by common elements, specific to a regional security system, based on common history and unanimously accepted geopolitics.

Final remarks

By weighing the foregoing, I conclude that this case study on CIS, include essential aspects of theories analysed. Without going into too much technical detail, of a presentation of the CIS, without minimize the objective hypothesis

and our work, I wanted to capture those elements mentioned above in relation to the two theories and the concept of regional security complex. Thus, during the Cold War, the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia were a unit, by setting the USSR. Applicability of neo-realist theory comes to its surprise features for this kind of association, whereas the need for security policy, establishing major objectives in the global hierarchy, which are framed and tested in the anarchic system full of Cold War competition. After completion of the Cold War, constructivist theory demonstrates that in these circumstances such an organization can and wants to continue its work. The applicability of this theory comes as a response, which shows that the common values that they share by their Slavic language, culture or history, but not least geographically, have led them to pursue a structure common, which needed to establish inter creating a regional security complex .

The principles that establish the general characteristics of a collective security complex is well defined within this organization. It finds a common interest, economic and cultural relations, close geographical area and especially their desire to preserve the character of the exclusivity from other organizations or global implications. In this respect, the view that their voice is done by the Kremlin, which otherwise cannot give up the safety and influence zones and strategic territories of other Member States. My opinion in this regard, is that the CIS is within the evolution of the theories presented, managing to surprise, we could say, in a classic way the development of complex regional security of organizations and with the character evolved from a predominantly neorealist , and the failure of its confirmation, with a constructivist approach, makes CIS today a classic example.

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THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES. A CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH
TO A NEO-REALIST CONSTRUCT

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