

THE TALE OF TWO CONSTRUCTIVISMS  
AT THE COLD WAR'S END

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# THE TALE OF TWO CONSTRUCTIVISMS AT THE COLD WAR'S END

VENDULKA KUBÁLKOVÁ

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Constructivism as an approach to IR and Soviet “new thinking” as a phenomenon of the final years of the cold war barely crossed paths since constructivism was coming into existence as an approach just as the other, “new thinking”, together with its main author, Mikhail Gorbachev, were about to exit international relations. Soviet “new thinking” is associated with Gorbachev’s tenure of office as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). This ran from the mid 1980s till the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Nicholas Onuf introduced constructivism in his book *World of Our Making* in 1989 and it was only in 1992, a year after the formal dissolution of the USSR, that Alexander Wendt referred to “new thinking” in his article “Anarchy is What States Make of it” as “one of the most important phenomena in [recent] world politics” (Wendt 1992, 450). It is in this same article that he also used the term constructivism, a term he borrowed from Onuf. Other, freshly converted constructivists followed in Wendt’s footsteps and, as evidence of the strength of their new approach, they often used “the DNA of the deceased”: Soviet “new thinking” and other artifacts and stories related to the cold war, which—with its main protagonist gone—was over. “New thinking” figures prominently again in Wendt’s theore-

tical book on constructivism, where it is probably the empirical case that he handles in a more sustained manner and devotes to it more time than to any other cases or examples (Wendt, 1999).

There are multiple ironies here. Whilst the USSR and its bloc existed Soviet thinking, new or otherwise—was never a topic, certainly not as “thinking” at any rate, since it could not count as thinking. The positivist ontological and epistemological premises of the Western social sciences decreed it possible to have only one truthful and accurate representation of objective reality. Anything contradicting that truth simply could not be “thinking.” It had to be intellectually inferior and deficient construct, a bunch of fabrications, distortions and or ex post facto justifications—in short, an ideology, concocted not to shed light on reality but to fool millions of Soviet and East European citizens who, by implication, must have been intellectually inferior not to see through it.

Having been raised myself as a “Soviet thinker,” that is, having not known anything else for the first half of my life other than what was taught at the Soviet empire’s Prague Charles University outpost, and having then studied in the West after fleeing there, I was never able to accept either of the corollaries of the positivist view. I could never accept that the thinking I was raised in was not thinking or that we were all fools. My university teachers in particular were not fools. Quite the contrary, they showed a great deal of personal courage and ex cathedra heroism, a quality we academics in the West are never called upon to demonstrate. While the Soviet Union was in existence I argued this point frequently and in vain in a number of my works on Soviet “new thinking” (particularly in a book entitled *Thinking New About Soviet New Thinking* [1989a]) and other works dealing with Soviet thinking in general (e.g., Kubálková and Cruickshank, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1980a, 1981, 1981a, 1983, 1985, 1985a, 1989, 1989a, and Kubálková, 1979, 1990, 1994).

Another irony in the rediscovery of “new thinking” as a topic is that it is not brought before us by former Sovietologists, but by IR theorists for whom Soviet “new thinking” has become something of a cause celebre to demonstrate the need for a constructivist approach to the post-cold war era. What is most ironic, however, is that the Wendtean form of constructivism which in this paper I call “soft” constructivism, gets Soviet new thinking wrong. This may be of little consequence as far as the history of the Soviet Union is concerned. However, the inability of the Wendtean constructivism to handle “new

thinking” and presenting it as a litmus test of the prowess of soft constructivism becomes serious if this form of constructivism is to be the response that IR scholars in the US make to the post cold war world.

That this may happen is not so difficult to imagine if we consider how constructivism has become elevated to one of the three main IR approaches. Steven Walt, for example, actually goes so far as to replace globalist, dependencia, neomarxist, and World System approaches with constructivist one, next to realist and liberal approaches and clearly he refers mainly to soft constructivism. (Walt, 1998, 38). The elevation to prominence of this brand of constructivism, replacing in the process an entire tradition, is certainly an indication of how seriously constructivism is treated, or how badly it is perceived to be needed.

It would seem that the mainstream American IR discipline made three changes to adjust to the blunders of failing the “end of the cold war” test. All three are related to constructivism, and all three underscore the interpretation of mainly soft constructivism designated as the IR approach to the post cold war era. First, there was recognition that such phenomena as Soviet “new thinking” might have held some clues missed by the approaches extant at the time of the Soviet Union’s unraveling and—equally importantly—that occurrences of similar phenomena might not be uncommon after the cold war’s end. Thus a bundle of new themes were added to the list of IR concerns. All of them have to do with what two prominent neoliberal writers called “ideational” factors (Keohane, Goldstein, 1993), the quirkish developments of the “agent” in the juxtaposition of agent and structure that Wendt introduced the IR audience to in 1987. All these terms are to do with the recognition of the “voluntaristic,” undetermined, aspect of IR, in which people, rather than material forces, play a role. The new IR topics, which became soon the biggest and most popular IR topics of the post cold war era, have been identity, intersubjectivity, meaning, motivation, interest, and culture. These happen to be the main topics of the soft constructivism.

The second adjustment is closely related. Namely, recognition that topics such as “new thinking” escaped the attention of both foreign policy analysis (FPA) and international politics (IP) as they were originally conceived. This has led to the creation of a new home for constructivism in “national security studies,” a field straddling and combining elements of both FPA and IP without having to redefine either of them (Katzenstein, 1996). Finally, the third change is—as I

already mentioned—the elevation of constructivism to one of the three main approaches to IR. It amounts to recognition that large number of topics and concerns were unaccounted for in the gamut of topics covered in the main approaches to IR whose names even undergraduates had to learn and recite. Thus the trio realism, pluralism and globalism, more recently relabeled as neorealism, neoliberalism and globalism, have been changed to read neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism.

For all practical purposes it would appear that this triple change wraps up the Third Debate, at least for the mainstream. Unrelated to the demise of the cold war, the Third Debate could be said to have prepared the ground for this triple change. Perhaps over-prepared is the word since many IR scholars, under the influence of Third Debate themes and expectations, might be reading more into these changes than they warrant.

The triple change I describe is only tenuously related to the Third Debate. None of these changes is antipositivist whilst the Third Debate was mainly an assault on positivism in the IR discipline. The non-positivist glimpses that most versions of soft constructivism provide are fleeting at best and the positivist framework has been never seriously challenged. It is as if for a few brief moments, the traffic swung to the left, only to return back straightaway to the right side of the road. Needless to say all of the other traffic has kept driving all the time or most of the time on the right.

All of this would be of little consequence if it were not for one detail, namely, that we do not have one constructivism but several. There is the post cold war soft constructivism encouraged and elevated by the academic politics of the aftermath of that discipline's glaring failure to have explained let alone anticipated the end of the cold war. And there are other constructivisms, which emerged out of the Third, that is the post-positivist, Debate in the IR discipline. The leaders of the mainstream have forewarned that the test as to which version of constructivism will make it will be played out in positivist terms, that is on the grounds of empirical utility, and this is the test we face now. Postmodern constructivists, the other form of constructivism that emerged out of the Third Debate, however disqualify themselves from such a contest based upon their anti-foundationalist claim denying that discourses have a reality behind them to be checked against. Rule-oriented constructivism accepts the challenge.



This paper is the tale of two constructivisms, the soft and the rule oriented, based on the work of Onuf (1989) and the Miami Theory Group (1998, 2001): the one that emerged from the post cold war adjustment of the IR mainstream and the other—a product of the Third Debate. The paper is the tale of these two constructivisms but also of the different tales that they tell about Soviet “new thinking.”

The paper is divided into two parts. First, I summarize the “verdict” as to what was the Soviet “new thinking” and what role it played in the ending of the cold war by neorealist and Sovietological approaches. I then proceed to the soft constructivism. I note that certainly if the example of the Soviet “new thinking” is anything to go by, the soft constructivism is very similar to the neoliberal approach in its conclusions concerning “new thinking.” Insofar as the latter is compatible with the neorealist approach as well, then mainstream constructivism, I will argue, is nothing more than mainstream IR adapted for the post cold war era. To use Ruggie’s formula combining the two “neo”s into one, we have a utilitarian approach modified by a dose of voluntarism.

Second, I show the differences in the treatment of the same Soviet “new thinking” by constructivists of the rule oriented variety. Here I use mainly my own work on “new thinking” based on the actual Soviet discourse. This paper is based on the forthcoming volume I have edited in the M. E. Sharpe series “International Relations in a Constructed World” of which Nicholas Onuf and myself are academic series editors. The book to be called *A Constructivist Handbook for Foreign Policy and International Relations* will be published in 2001 and it contains some of the basic concepts on which this paper relies.

Triumphalism and its neoliberal  
and soft constructivist modifications

If Wendt is right in saying that Soviet “new thinking” was one of the most important phenomena of our time how is it that only a few years before Wendt made that statement, his IR colleagues thought that they could ignore it?

As an “important phenomenon”, to use Wendt’s words, “new thinking” should have been noted in a large number of academic disciplines however, particularly if it were not quite clear what it was: Sovietology, comparative communism, a history of the cold war, foreign policy analysis, the foreign policy of the US, of the USSR, political

theory (which should have noted a change in Soviet ideology), or theory of International Relations. It was noted in some, evaded in others and in most of them misunderstood.

### *Neorealism*

The problem with the neorealist IR position, the dominant approach to IR at the time of the Soviet new thinking, is that it makes two static “snapshots” of the world, one before and one after the collapse of the USSR. It has no way of connecting the two.

Take the snapshot of Gorbachev at the helm of the USSR. No matter what he might have said and expressed in his “new thinking”, to IR theorists, it did not matter. The Cold War was a bipolar structure, and this determined the Soviet Union’s interests in a way that could not be overridden by any amount of talk and wishful thinking. Neorealism, by definition, shuts out consideration of domestic features of individual states, relegating them to the theoretical margins. According to Kenneth Waltz’s famous *Theory of International Politics* (1979) the world ran to the design which he had discovered. As he put it, if there is a theory of IP, the balance of power it is. What then could Soviet “new thinking” possibly mean to neorealists? The answer is “nothing.” When I presented a paper at Berkeley about Soviet “new thinking” in the presence of Kenneth Waltz in 1988 he agreed that “new thinking” “looked like” a theory of IR. No theory however can “wish away” Newton’s law of gravity and make objects fall upwards instead of downwards. Neorealists cannot possibly see how any amount of thinking could alter the material structure (the cold war) under which a Gorbachev had to make his rational choices.

A systemic change/transformation as momentous as the end of the cold war was deemed by neorealists at any rate, impossible short of superpower war (Lebow and Risse Kappen, p. I) By the logic of Hobbesian anarchy and the logic of the balance of power, exogenously imposed on the USA as well as the Soviet Union, Gorbachev had to do everything he could to protect the Soviet position in the structure as defined by Waltz. He should have balanced, formed alliances, and tried to regain his country’s strength. Instead, the Soviet Union literally gave away its territorial holdings, the geopolitical acquisitions of the Second World War, and actively encouraged East European satellites to go their own way. For the first time since the Sino-Soviet split a Soviet leader got on well with a Chinese leader. The newly fashioned

Sino-Soviet entente and alliance was not put to the use that it should have been in realist terms. The Soviet Union made passes at the United States, but not of the sort expected by realists. Somehow, Gorbachev “defied” or tried to defy, the exogenous forces under which he was deemed to be laboring.

Take a second neorealist snapshot, this time of the end of the cold war after the collapse of the USSR. The ex post facto explanation of this collapse is that internal problems weakened the Soviet Union to the point that they changed the structure of bipolarity. Thus the conclusion: “we have won.” A realist of Morgenthau’s variety might have argued that Gorbachev paid the price of his irrational behavior, and so did the Soviet Union (for which Russians now hate him!) Neorealism however makes no place for irrational behavior. Thus the leap between the two snapshots and to the conclusion of claiming victory of this terminal contest, though realists were not fully aware at the time that the contest was actually terminal!

The message is very important though, since it serves to legitimize the hegemonic unipolar world structure that resulted with its single superpower and its broad mandate for NATO activities, as some authors claim, in the resultant world.

### *Sovietology*

What was “new thinking” to a positivist, liberal, “détente” Sovietologist on whose perspective depended the FPA What did they study? How and why had Gorbachev changed his foreign policy and what, if anything, had Soviet “new thinking” to do with it?

A great deal was written on Soviet new thinking at the same time as it came into existence. There were different definitions of what “new thinking” meant, even in those studies specifically dedicated to its analysis in the US, UK, Germany and China (see for example, Berner and Dahm, 1987/88; Dallin, 1987; Evangelista, 1987; Glickham, 1986; Legvold, 1988a, 1988b; Light, 1987a, 1988; Meissner, 1986; Miller, 1988; Sestanovich, 1988; Shenfield, 1987; Snyder, 1987/88; Valkenier, 1987; Wettig, 1987; Zhi and Zhang, 1988). No Sovietologist disputed that something had changed but the identifying what that something was remained constrained by the positivist premises on which mainstream Sovietology, as well as mainstream IR studies, had become based.

Simply put, and consistent with positivist premises, “new thinking” seemed to be the new style of a new broom. Gorbachev was

new. The Sovietologists meticulously listed all of the ways in which Gorbachev represented a break from the “old style,” i.e. from the “old thinking” of the Brezhnev variety. He was much younger, he changed the entire diplomatic establishment, and he traveled a great deal (his geriatric three predecessors, Brezhnev, Chernenko and Andropov, had all died in office and were too elderly to travel.) Not only did he travel but also he took his wife with him, unlike his predecessors, whose wives made their first appearances at their husbands’ funerals. Gorbachev and his wife looked, dressed, and sounded like Westerners.

There were Sovietologists who noted that Soviet new thinking consisted of a number of points or principles. These were differently identified, however. Thus Margot Light, for example listed six main points (1988); Alexander Dallin four (1987), Charles Glickham about seven (1986) and Jack Snyder (1987/88) none. Legvold, meanwhile, found “new thinking” to mean changed attitudes in four regards, 1. security, 2. interdependence, 3. the Third World, and 4. socialist states (1988).

According to Shestanovich “new thinking” meant “devaluation of ideological precepts, a more complacent assessment of outside threats, a re-examination of national interests and heavier stress on global ‘common’ interests, a cap on resource commitments, a search for less expensive policy instruments, a more flexible and less demanding stance in negotiations, and an arms-length attitude toward friends in need and an insistence that they do more to help themselves, avoidance of actions that adversaries can treat as provocations, and so forth” (1988, 4). Characteristically both Legvold and Shestanovich used their own words in formulating and reformulating what “new thinking” and its principles were, and not the words of any Soviet writer or spokesman.

Since there was in the West no agreement about the content of Soviet “new thinking,” any IR expert could borrow whatever he wanted. Thus “new thinking” was seen not only as a new foreign policy style but also as a new strategic doctrine. The foreign policy analysts placed whatever these principles might have been in the context provided by the FPA and by the neorealist understanding of the constraints under which whatever it was that was happening in the Soviet Union was taking place.

*After the USSR's collapse: neoliberal institutionalism, mainstream constructivism and the "new thinking"*

Once the Cold War had ended and the dust had settled, it became obvious just how big a social change the world had undergone. Scholar after scholar expressed surprise: Why would the USSR give up the Brezhnev Doctrine and let East Europe go? Why let the Warsaw Pact disintegrate when under the same strategic conditions earlier on it would never have considered doing so, asks Peter Katzenstein. (Katzenstein, 1996). Many IR scholars with liberal leanings suspected that the key issues were out of the conceptual reach of neorealism and even of liberalism, and that what went on in the USSR under the label of "new thinking" might hold the clue.

Two germinal pieces concerning these questions, and separated by only one year when they appeared were both obviously inspired by the end of the cold war. Wendt wrote his famous constructivist article in 1992 (Wendt, 1992). Another book of innovations, this time neo-liberal institutionalist, came out had on the heels of Wendt's piece, in 1993, namely a book entitled *Ideas in Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993) Adding to this literature is Katzenstein's collection of case studies published in 1996 (Katzenstein, ed., 1996). There followed a number of other studies, which used one or other of these frameworks or fused the two making it difficult to distinguish them. In addition to the chapter on Soviet "new thinking" by Herman (in Katzenstein, 1996) I also refer to the book on the subject by Checkel (1997) and to the collection of essays dedicated to the Soviet "new thinking" inspired by either neoliberalism or constructivism and edited by Lebow and Risse Kappen (1995). Wendt returns to "new thinking" again in his 1999 book.

How did scholars argue their new case? "Reigning realist and liberal explanations cannot adequately account for 'new thinking's' revolutionary character," Herman says, for example. Realism, he continues, is too preoccupied with material capabilities, the structural constraints on political actors. Liberalism, too, marginalizes the "social processes that spawned the core ideas of mature New Thinking." (Herman, 1996, 272) How do we suddenly know however, that "new thinking," (read, the "new style" of the "new broom") was so seemingly "revolutionary," and that it had passed through stages enabling it to "mature?"

Most of authors of this genre explicitly state that their wish is not to contradict but to complement the liberalist and realist approaches. The impression one gets is that they want to complement/ qualify the rather awkwardly argued neorealist argument that “we have won” the cold war. Neorealists, as I have tried to show in the previous section, did not, or could not, shed light on how this process of social change became possible.

What then do the two approaches identified above conclude was the nature of “new thinking” and its role in ending the cold war and in the collapse of the Soviet Union? Both neoliberal institutionalists and constructivists take away some of the glory of a US victory in the cold war claimed by neorealists, and/or they spread and apportion the credit for the victory in such a way as to include others and other factors, not just the USA and its various policies. It is the question of producing evidence that is troubling. It is as though there is a temporary amnesty to scholars who are self avowedly positivist, to allow them to eschew positivist rigor and to issue the command: go and find whatever evidence you can and bring it in, it will be accepted.

The shades and details may differ but the “helpers” in the victory the USA had are all liberal favorites. It is either the tremendously contagious ideas of democracy, freedom etc., which when people taste, or simply hear about it, they never get over. These ideas penetrated the Soviet Union, goes the argument, in the détente years when academic exchanges took place. Or, they simply “rubbed off” on the Soviet elites as a result of interdependence and the “learning” which it inevitably brings. Or, it was Mikhail Gorbachev himself who took steps facilitating the US victory, either as a liberal reformer himself, or simply as a rational leader. For some scholars he did it alone, for others, there was pressure from local elites. Accordingly, argues Herman, “new thinking” represents a “genuine reconceptualization of interests grounded in new collective understandings about the dynamics of world politics and in actors’ evolving identities.” The “turn in Soviet international policy” he goes on, “was the product of cognitive evolution and policy entrepreneurship by networks of Western-oriented in-system reformers coincident with the coming to power of a leadership committed to change and receptive to new ideas for solving the country’s formidable problems.” Checkel seems to concur, putting the role of reform and democratic ideas, and the “subversive” role of US academics, into a “neorealist context”: changes in a state’s external

environment create “windows of opportunity through which policy entrepreneurs ...jump,” when the domestic institutional setting “affects their ability to influence policy” (ibid.). “As structures weaken, [he explains], access to policymaking increases ..., [thus] creat[ing] a greater number of pathways for promoters of new ideas” (Checkel, 1997:7).

Who are these promoters? How do we measure their influence? What exactly triggers an “ideational change?” Herman continues: liberal specialists developed new understanding about cause-and-effect relationships in international politics (274). The principles governing the relations among the Western democracies and within those societies, he goes on, were transmitted to Soviet reformers through the kind of transnational contacts with Western, liberal-Left counterparts that flourished in the 1970s and survived *détente*’s precipitous decline (275). Out goes the objectivity of the academy, which hereby plays the role of agent of influence, with the responsibility for subverting one of the world’s superpowers as its contribution to world peace.

Wendt’s conclusion is less enthusiastically put and more sober. His argument is more complicated but he is not that far from some cold war historians who, having regarded cold war to be a matter of clashing ideas conclude that when Gorbachev “changed his mind” cold war ended (Mueller, 1995). Wendt too gives almost full credit for the victory of the USA in the cold war to the Soviets. The Soviets won it for the USA. He argues that Gorbachev’s “new thinking” was the policy that allowed the change from a competitive to a cooperative security system. He covers his bets by saying that the existence of this new cooperative relationship may still be in doubt, and may not last. It developed, however, according to Wendt, in a four-stage process, namely,

1. the breakdown of the consensus about identity commitments inside the USSR resulting from the giving up of an aggressive posture, and bolstered by reassurances from the West that it would not attack the Soviet Union;
2. these changed ideas then led to rethinking the Soviet identity, the discovery of “new selves” by the Russians, and the recognition of how much the old selves fed the old competitive structure;
3. then there followed “altercasting,” that is, the presentation of the Soviet Union by Soviet elites (now with new identity) in such a way so as to change the identity of the USA as well.

This was accomplished by such actions as withdrawal from Eastern Europe and Afghanistan, i.e. by reducing in turn the US need to perceive the Soviets as a threat;

4. and finally the establishment of a firm intersubjective basis between the US and USSR to their understanding of their changed relationship.

Wendt returns to the “new thinking” in 1999. Gorbachev’s “new thinking,” he argues, was

a deep conceptual reassessment of what the US-Soviet relationship “was”. It was constitutive theorizing, at the lay level, and based on it the Soviets were able to end, unilaterally and almost overnight, a conflict that seemed like it had become set in stone. It may be that objective conditions were such that the Soviets “had” to change their ideas about the Cold War, but that does not change the fact in an important sense those ideas were the Cold War, and as such changing them by definition changed the reality. (374)

For, he argues, “reality is being caused by theory rather than vice-versa.” (76) Thus he is quite right when he described his approach as structural idealism, an inversion of the approach of the structural realists whom he criticizes as those “wedded to the blind forces model of intentional action”:

Certainly the economic and military pressures on the Soviet state were a crucial impetus for change. However, a structural pressures theory alone cannot explain the form the Soviet response took (ending the Cold War rather than intensifying repression) or its timing (the material decline had been going on for some time). And it also ignores the role that the leadership’s realization that its own policies were part of the problem played in conditioning that response. Structural conditions did not force self-awareness on the Soviets. Soviet behavior changed because they redefined their interest as a result of having looked at their existing desires and beliefs self-critically. The reflective model of intentional explanation captures this process more naturally than the blind forces model. (p. 129)

And, this is how he explains the “reflective model:”

When social kinds are reified there is a clear distinction between subject and object. However, there are occasions when collectives become aware of the social kinds they are constituting and move to change them, in what might be called a moment of “reflectivity”: for decades, for example, the Soviet union treated the Cold War as a given. Then in the 1980s it engaged in “New Thinking,” an important outcome of which was the realization that aggressive foreign policies contributed to Western hostility, which in turn forced the Soviets to engage in high levels of defense spending.



By acting on that understanding to conciliate the West, the Gorbachev regime virtually single-handedly ended the Cold War. In effect, if a social kind can “know itself” then it may be able to recall its human authorship, transcend the subject-object distinction, and create new social kinds. (Wendt p. 76)

Soviet new thinking he argues serves as an example that “even states are capable of. . . thinking reflexively”. (374) It is also an example of a situation in which, he argues, “deliberation can generate dramatic “preference reversals” even while structural conditions remain constant”. And so “the cognitive and deliberative arguments may overlap. The principles informing Soviet “Reason” were not wholly independent of beliefs about the identity of the Soviet state, the feasibility of certain actions, and even about right and wrong. Deliberation about national interests takes place against the background of a shared national security discourse, in other words, which may substantially affect its content. (p. 129)

Relative to the amount published about “new thinking” at the time of its occurrence the post cold war studies are very few, and often not by former Sovietologists. Most are amazingly selective in choosing the sources they cite (and mix). Nor are there any guidelines given as to what type of evidence should or should not be brought to bear and the standard positivist strictures are obviously set aside.

Except to pick up little snippets here and there this rather unpositivist attitude is largely due to the reluctance to go “inside the USSR.” Both neoliberal and mainstream constructivist abide by the strictures of keeping domestic and international politics separate. Nor, despite the stress on things ideational did they change the standard Sovietological approach of treating the Soviets as if they were mute. Reformers or not, therefore, Soviets are presumed not to talk. Their words are not cited. They are described in our own terms. Remember, even when they were reformists (according to the old Sovietologists) they only “spoke ideology.” We can only quote them, even now, when they speak like we do.

True enough, the Soviet Union is gone, and its case is used now not by Sovietologists or post-Sovietologists but by theorists of IR, who only want to demonstrate the validity of the emerging neoliberal and constructivist frameworks for handling social change. Besides, many of the authors are not Sovietologists by training or trade and nor is their audience. Thus nobody picks up their mistakes (Herman, for example, is simply wrong when he argues that “other central elements”

of ““new thinking”” e.g., the relationship between peace and socialism, and between class values and “values common to all mankind,” were the product of ongoing debate within the socialist bloc, Herman, 275.) Positivist standards would lead one to expect some documentation would be offered, first, as to who were all these “new thinkers” before attaching the label to some only, and without any explanation as to why to them and not to others. By positivist standards it could be expected that these authors would recognize and acknowledge differences among their sources and minimally explain why they rely on some sources (or their part only) and ignore the rest or other sources.

Not for the sake of further analysis of this particular historical incident, but for future reference, I will now summarize the frameworks which generated this discussion. The two approaches, neoinstitutionalist liberalism and mainstream constructivism, appear to be very different, which they must be, if they are alternative paradigms that they are claimed to be.

Judging from the analysis of Gorbachev’s “new thinking,” differences between the two approaches are substantively negligible. I concur with Jennifer Sterling-Folker, that mainstream constructivism does not offer a paradigmatic alternative to neoliberal institutionalism (Sterling-Folker, 2000: 98) As she points out, both constructivists and neoliberals are interested in much the same things as “potential evidence. ” They share the same ontology and same epistemology and they rely on the same post hoc explanations (p. 100). Both are positivist and emphasize that their purpose is not to replace, let alone discredit the mainstream approaches but to complement them. Thus I agree that they are no more than complementary theories within the larger framework of liberal IR theory (p. 100) She reaches this conclusion mainly on the argument that both neoliberal institutionalists and mainstream constructivists depend on the same mechanism of functional, institutional efficiency in order to account for social change. Let me, in conclusion of this section and for the record, summarize the two frameworks side by side. (Table 1)

Like neorealists, neoliberals subscribe to the idea that states’ actions are restricted by the overpowering “logic of anarchy,” but they concede that institutions, namely organizations or patterns of recurrent relationship, can also act as constraints, thus possibly modifying the material constraints stressed by structural realists. Goldstein and Keohane argue that ideas can become a significant independent variable, i.e. the factor which may help to explain or predict the dependent variable, in this

case foreign policy. International institutions, they argue, can transform state identities and interests.

The framework offered by both aims at reducing the element of unpredictability in the event that a state like the Soviet Union, following a different logic from that of the neorealist “logic of anarchy,” suspends the rigors of positivism. Both of these approaches set out to correct the focus on material structures in the explanation of a state’s foreign policy. Both agree that one also needs to examine **ideational** factors in addition to those emphasized by neorealism, i.e. such material forces as bipolarity, and other balance of power considerations, as well as institutional developments, added by the neoinstitutionalist mainstream theorists. Policy choices and behavior are constrained/dictated by both these material **and** institutional factors. Most authors begin with a declaration to this effect, namely that material forces, by themselves, cannot account for actual policies. A new focus is needed to ascertain how ideas, norms, rules, and learning affect decision makers’ preferences and, ultimately, foreign policy outcomes. Or, to use the neoliberal jargon, particular circumstances (both systemic and domestic) create the foundation (scope conditions) for policy change and the implementation of new ideas (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:30). All of these authors seem to concur that material structures coexist with social structures and that they both codetermine a state’s behavior, thus opening up an avenue for the investigation of factors previously excluded. Stressing the need to adopt an “institutional-ideational” framework to account for foreign policy outcomes, Checkel (1997:xi), for instance, examines the “interaction between ideas, political institutions, and the international system,” to explain the process through which ideas have shaped Soviet/Russian foreign policy.

The common denominator of these studies is the acknowledgment that ideational factors, in addition to material ones, shape elite preferences, interests, and policies. Hence the need to scrutinize the exact relationship between these factors, that is, how structures and institutions constrain foreign policy, but also how they leave a range of choice (the possibility to articulate different policy paths), so that ideological factors like beliefs, culture, or “historical narratives” need to be looked at as well.

Table 1 enables me to skip the technical detail of the subtle differences between the two approaches in theoretical terms. I compare the two approaches, focusing on their similarities and differences. In regard to their commitment to positivism, rational choice, the expla-

nation of social change, the attention to domestic politics, and to language, they do not differ. I mark in the middle of Table 1 the areas where they differ, namely in regard to processing ideas, interests, identities etc. Constructivists of the Wendt variety are “reflective,” and their argument goes deeper than that of neoliberals who simply place ideas in the rational context *tout court*. To Wendt it is a more philosophically erudite process, that is, for him the objective world becomes intersubjectively available, and disciplined inquiry can make intersubjective understanding more reliable. His constructivism goes no further, however. Thus it can be absorbed into the hegemonic discourse of North American IR without undue discomfort on either side.

The conclusion reached by both neoliberal institutionalists and mainstream constructivists seems to be counterintuitive. It also flies in the face of the facts: the main beneficiaries of the collapsed Soviet Union and its bumpy transition were from the beginning the former Party officials in what is now an overwhelmingly corrupt and totally bankrupt economic system, demodernized and returned to the standard in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Cohen, 2000). It takes a leap of faith to argue with any degree of conviction that any Soviet leader would have agreed on behalf of his country to plunge into the disarray characteristic of the “transition” in which the former Soviet Union still finds itself.

Neither neoliberals nor constructivists have come with any other suggestion, however.

#### Soviet “new thinking” and rule oriented constructivism

Rule oriented constructivism comes very naturally to a person who studies, here in the West, the culture/religion/ideology from which he/she hails. Or to a person who takes seriously the work of insiders in the areas he/she studies. That in itself is a step in the direction of acknowledging that the world is constructed differently in its different parts. Studying Soviet pronouncements, as I have done, is a step in the direction of recognizing that words matter. To those of us who were “insiders” somewhere else before becoming “insiders” in the US, constructivism is simply common sense, and need not be learned. Positivism, in contrast, has to be learned and in my experience, the learning is by no means easy.

To be a social scientist working in IR or in any other Western social science means keeping one’s personal concerns, experiences and political commitments very much to oneself, and certainly out of one’s work.

Personal experience is suitable for writing memoirs or belles-lettres, not for scholarship. Social scientists apply the same sanitized, dehumanized approach not only to themselves but also to their subject matter, purging it of people. One way to achieve this is simply not to study people but to study reifications instead, objects made up of people that is. Another way is to observe their behavior. In both cases the point is to forget that it is people, with their intentions and meanings that are involved.

Objectivity, and the elimination of subjectivity, requires another crucial step: imputing uniform, apriori, given, inescapable rationality, either to every human being, American, Czech or Russian, or to every reified institution made up of Americans, Czechs, or Russians. The positivist scholar is taught to speak and write in the passive voice (or to use the royal “we”). This is regarded as appropriate since the pursuit of knowledge is scholarly, that is, objective, value free, and untainted by any subjective biases.

*Soviet “new thinking” from the “horse’s mouth”*

I began collecting all Soviet sources as they were published, articles, speeches and later also books, on the subject of new thinking. The concept of new thinking crystallized in the first year of Gorbachev’s tenure of office of General Secretary of the CPSU. In fact other authors, high up in the Soviet hierarchy wrote on the subject first, before Gorbachev took up the concept. There was confusion amongst the Soviet decision-making elite as to what it was (Petrovsky). There must have been concern that the Soviet population at large might not understand it either. Thus Pravda published a series of political cartoons putting it in clear and graphic terms for everybody to see. I carefully tracked who were the writers on the subject in a flowchart of the Soviet State and Party organization. I studied their biographies to discover their professional/ intellectual/ educational backgrounds, to find out whether they did or did not study outside the USSR, or what their previous assignments were. I tried to read as many publications by these authors as possible. This proved to be a daunting task: Georgi Shakhnazarov, one of Gorbachev’s closest advisors, wrote more than 50 books, some under the *nom de plume* G. Shakh. I paid particular attention to who these writers cited, and in particular who were their Western sources of inspiration. I kept track of the personal changes Gorbachev made to the leading state and party institutions by moving

personnel and creating new bodies. I took careful note of the tasks assigned to different research outfits and confirmed some of these developments in discussions with Soviet defectors. I found it interesting that Gorbachev's wife Raisa was a professor of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, and had introduced her husband to a circle of her colleagues and their philosophical discussions, which apparently he enjoyed. Gorbachev elevated at least one of this circle beyond mere academic status.

*The duality of the "new thinking"'s sources*

Right off the bat I found a little puzzle, however, namely the actual words "new thinking." Soviet authors stressed these tirelessly—and equally tirelessly, their Western "watchers" ignored them. In the West, as I came to argue, the meaning of the term "new thinking" was set in terms of its antonym, "old thinking," understood to be the old Soviet, Marxist-Leninist, inflexible, aggressive, Brezhnevite type of thinking. Gorbachev's group acknowledged that they were trying to depart from some of Brezhnev's practices and from those of other Soviet leaders. However, as Gorbachev and his team repeated, the term "new thinking" was borrowed from Albert Einstein, who had coined it for the Pugwash Peace movement. Specifically, it was used for the manifesto written jointly for Pugwash by Einstein and Bertrand Russell. "New thinking"'s antonym—the old thinking that was to be supplanted by the "new thinking"—was not the Soviet thinking. Rather, "new thinking" was to replace what we here in the West call realist, state centric thinking, the Westphalian system that Gorbachev agreed with Einstein, had become untenable (with its reliance on the use of violence) in the nuclear era. The mainstream realism we teach and propagate here in the West was, in this view, tantamount to war propaganda and should be banned! Western analysts could not possibly have missed the meaning the Soviets were trying to convey with the term "new thinking." "New thinking" was not to be the Soviet thinking only but thinking of the entire humanity in the nuclear age. However they chose to set it aside. The Western analysts probably regarded it as not important enough to deserve comment, however, or as thwarting the spin that they chose to put on what "new thinking" meant.

There were many other differences between the Soviet meaning and the Sovietological interpretation of "new thinking." Most of its

associated concepts, as I documented in detail, had a dual source, one Soviet, one Western. I kept jotting them down as they emerged. I also started collecting the work of Sovietologists on the subject, not restricting myself to the US or English literature, but including also German and Chinese authors. My reading of the Soviet texts led me to the conclusion that the term “new thinking” had ten regular conceptual associates. There were, in other words, ten aspects to Soviet “new thinking,” and only the inclusion of all of them gave a clear idea of what the Soviets meant. They were

1. the global problems of mankind, or “global human problems” (nuclear catastrophe, ecological disaster, poverty, etc);
2. the interdependence for survival of mankind in a world regarded as one interrelated totality;
3. the renunciation of war (there was therefore no such a thing as a Soviet “threat”);
4. the concept of peace as the highest of humanity’s values;
5. the regarding of the security of all states as global and indivisible;
6. the attainability of security not by military but political means, not on the basis of the “balance of power” but of the “balance of interests” in a comprehensive system of security;
7. the reduction in the level of military confrontation in all areas;
8. the basing of the size of military arsenals on “reasonable sufficiency” to repel aggression;
9. the stress on flexibility in IR so as to reflect the realistic assessment of them;
10. the co-existence of socialism and capitalism in one interrelated and interdependent world (where the mode of thought that continued to distinguish socialism from capitalism was Marxist-Leninist historical materialism based on dialectics).

Taken in isolation from each other this mixed bag of points and ideas would have baffled many an analyst. Some authors thought these points were mutually contradictory. Thus many authors picked only one or two points and ignored the rest. A focus only on point

9 for example, led to appreciation of a new approach/new style of foreign policy. Points 5 – 9 suggested a new doctrine of national security. Points 1 – 4 were usually listed by Sovietologists at the end of any discussion of “new thinking” and dismissed as propaganda. Points 5 – 8, taken in isolation, could be seen as indicating no more than a fresh wave of rhetoric. Point 10 was seldom cited at all, and if it was, then only to argue that it conflicted with the rest.

My interpretation was different I saw the ten points were just a tip of an iceberg—a small part of a profoundly significant and far-reaching intellectual/ideological change and reorientation. I interpreted the ten points of Soviet “new thinking” as consisting of essentially of four things:

1. a new Soviet ideology
2. a new form of Marxism
3. a new theory of IR
4. a new guide for foreign policy action.

My case rested on very shaky grounds by the standards of positivist scholarship, however. I had first to prove the validity of my hypothesis that Soviet new thinking pertained to these ten principles and secondly that it originated from the pens of decision and policy-making elites close to Gorbachev. My other “evidence” was based on a comprehensive survey of all sources and a flowchart indicating the location of authors of “new thinking” in the Soviet apparatus, however. My evidence was a collection of cartoons from Pravda showing what the Soviet elites wanted the Soviet population to associate with the concept. My “evidence” included an “intersubjective consensus” amongst a small handful of analysts, most of them from outside the USA. It was not enough. Thus I was delighted to find that Glickham’s analysis came close to mine, that some German analysts concurred that new thinking was not a foreign policy expedient (Meissner, 1987:3) or disinformation (Wettig, 1987a 144) that like me, two other German scholars also thought that new thinking was “a grand theory” (Grosskonzeption) (Bernier and Dahm, 1987, 5), and that Chinese analysts concurred that new thinking was a formal repudiation of Lenin’s theory of imperialism positivist rules of evidence were not met. I cited for support some American Sovietologists who agreed that Gorbachev could not have been a closet democratic reformer because he understood by “democracy” something very different from the idea of it



impute to him. Gorbachev meant by democracy at best grass roots democracy at the micro societal level, that is, free elections at the enterprise, primary party organization, and local soviet level—but not at the macro institutional level, which included state and party organs. (Bialer, 1987 64) Another commentator pointed out that the “democratization” of the interstices of the party advocated by Gorbachev, which some western observers mistook for a genuine wish to democratize the entire Soviet society, excluded non-members of the party. It meant no more than democratization of the rule by whites in South Africa, that is, which did not affect apartheid in any way and which maintained the policy of excluding black voters (Handleman 1987, 33) None of this was evidence that satisfied the positivist consensus either. Until constructivists took it out of the mothballs Soviet “new thinking” had ceased to exist, and the debate about it was closed.

*Rule oriented constructivist interpretation*

I should stress right at the outset that there are two ways a constructivist can proceed: either going for the big picture or its fragment. As we have pointed out before (Kubálková, Onuf, Kowert, 1998) constructivism presents a picture of social reality of enormous complexity. That does not rule out the possibility of “zooming” in on one or more aspects of this complex picture, however. It is this possibility Koslowski and Kratochwil pursued in their 1996 study, the first ever rule oriented constructivist interpretation of an aspect of Soviet “new thinking” (Koslowski, Kratochwil, 1996—also a footnote). In it the authors singled out one rule, the Soviet Internationalism, a. k. a. the Brezhnev doctrine and shown just how a change in one rule affected the entire system. I fully agree with the conclusions they came to. However, by comparing the range of approaches to “new thinking” in this paper, I have committed myself to a somewhat broader, option. Even so I limit myself to a particular aspect of the Soviet society, to do mainly with the understanding of Gorbachev as agent and the social structure from which he arose, in order to discuss his rationality. Limited space precludes my doing justice to it, but I hope to be able to go far enough here to make my interpretation of “new thinking” a convincing one. I refer a reader to my larger study on the subject (1989a) and a reader interested in constructivism of the rule oriented variety to Onuf 1989 or Kubálkova et al 1998 or Kubálkova 2001.

Constructivism has nothing to say directly about “new thinking” *per se* or about Gorbachev. What it does do is direct our research to certain areas of social relations. A positivist scholar would only reluctantly consider the material I have just summarized in the previous section. This, though, is the starting point for rule-oriented constructivists. It is the preliminary to what in Chapter 3 (2001 forthcoming) I called Step 3. Constructivism’s first concern is to find “rules”, understood here as a crucial form of human and social activity that enables us to see people as interacting in, and with, an inextricably social and material world. Thus while “ideology” or “propaganda” are not regarded by positivists as admissible evidence, to constructivists they contain rules, and these rules need to be sorted out not only in terms of their relation to agents and to structure, but also by their type (instructive, directive, and commissive). This particular categorization offers additional insight into other, non-linguistic aspects of the social world as well again, space precludes me pursuing further this line of enquiry.

### *Soviet ideology*

In my earlier work I argued against the point blank dismissal of Soviet ideology. I argued that Soviet ideology ought not to be viewed as amorphous or homogeneous, but rather as consisting of a highly structured body of ideas whose various roles were played out with respect to their overall position within a whole ideological framework. To simplify the argument, that framework can be represented in pyramidal form, with different ideas corresponding to different levels of the pyramid (Kubálkova and Cruickshank, 1985, 1989, 71ff, 1989a 15ff).

The ideas at the apex always performed a largely rhetorical, ceremonial, propagandist, and legitimizing role, whilst also acting as the binding agent for the whole structure. This function remained unchanged throughout Soviet history. But the pyramid had other levels that performed other roles. As the axiomatic value of all levels declined, the heuristic potential of the pyramid’s lower levels rose, and the number of elements open to debate and research increased.

There had always existed a degree of mobility and flexibility in the pyramidal structure, as old axioms were opened up for debate, or as ideas developed by those whose research was more unconstrained began percolating upwards. This is not to deny that change was a rare

and painful process, which had to wait years to be officially promulgated, usually from the platform of Congresses of the CPSU. More than 5,000 delegates attended congresses. They did not lend themselves to anything other than announcements. In the welter of largely ceremonial speeches major doctrinal change could easily get lost, such as the change that took place under Gorbachev's leadership at the 27<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress in 1986. This, incidentally, was a change that Western Sovietologists mostly missed.

The main idea at the ideological apex was that of communism as the "future of mankind." The definition of communism played a central role in the rituals and symbolic ceremonial practices of the Soviet regime. It was crucial to any understanding of the other parts of Soviet ideology, for two reasons at least. Firstly, the notion that communism was the future of mankind took the form of an assertive rule that required acceptance on faith. The Soviets argued that historical materialism allowed them to predict "scientifically" that communism was the future of humanity. They saw their predictions as being based upon a scientific understanding of the past and as a scientific projection of the pattern that historical materialism had uncovered onto future. At the same time, however, communism was not just a social goal. Following Lenin's definition in 1920, it was an ethical and moral standard for the world as well.

These ideas about communism formed the core of Soviet Marxist Leninist ideology, remaining largely unchanged after 1917, and indeed being largely unchangeable, having been lifted virtually verbatim from the work of Karl Marx. They were used to show how in the Soviet way of thinking the normative and the descriptive were one. The ideas concerning communism were also unconfirmable and unfalsifiable, however. They were more akin to articles of faith, and generation after generation accepted these notions on faith. If they had changed, the entire system would have become something else, as was borne out in due course when these notions were changed.

In my constructivist reading these ideas took the form of instructive rules that made the form of Soviet rule predominantly hegemonic. (see Table 3. 4, 2001, forthcoming). Soviet ideology had a strong moral component and its instructive rules were unusually strong as a consequence. Its hegemonic character was that of a secular religion. This character was modified, but was not completely lost, by coercive sanctions in the form of directive rules, meted out to those who did not comply with the "faith." The goal was to fully internalize the

instructive rules whereby Soviet Marxism-Leninism was presented, though it never quite worked out like that, despite the decreeing of a “moral code” for “builder[s] of communism” in 1960, for example, the Soviet equivalent of the “ten commandments.”

The second important role the core Marxist-Leninist ideas played was a legitimizing one. Since its inception, Soviet ideology had been for the Soviet Union what democratic processes and elections are for Western democracies today, or what filial relations are for monarchies. The Soviet system’s legitimacy was based on what was deemed the “superior” way of thinking that Marx thought only the proletariat (and with Lenin, the proletariat under the guidance of the Bolsheviks) was capable of. The leadership of the Communist Party, in other words, had its epistemological roots deep in Marx’s ideas about private property as alienating those who owned it and as impairing their ability to think in an undistorted way.

The importance, from my point of view, of this second aspect of Marxist dogma is that, together with the relevant practices, it became part of the social structure called the Soviet Union

#### *Gorbachev's social structure*

Gorbachev inherited this social structure, that which Onuf prefers to call a social arrangement and his agency was defined in these terms. Gorbachev was not answerable or accountable to the people as he would have been if the USSR were a democratic state. Instead he and the Party were vested with a superior way of knowing and could always be paternalistic towards the people, who needed to be lead and guided. Like the priesthood in religious societies, the Communist Party, the agent here, was entrusted “by history” with the task of leading the society along the path of transformation to communism, as defined in terms of the negation of all the injustices and inequalities capitalism wrought, and above all, the abolition of private property.

The social structure of which Gorbachev was the agent also contained cumbersome and inefficient political and economic institutions, however. The latter in particular, despite incessant attempts to reform them, were incapable of providing food for the Soviet population in most years. This social structure provided the main constraints on Gorbachev when he took over from his predecessors. As an agent, as a human being, with the ability to choose and to act on his choices, Gorbachev gave the structure a dynamic social element. He as agent

gave it an intentionality, and meaning. He could not just “jump out” of the social arrangement he inherited, however, because in rule-oriented constructivist terms, the rules of that arrangement made him a part of it. The social structure represented the full range of values and principles, the recurrent patterns of social behavior, and the institutions and practices, which weighed him down. He sought to make his choices under this weight. It was this structure and not some abstract apriori notion—as formulated by Western rational choice principles, for example—which defined for him the nature of his agency, as well as what might constitute the meaning of rationality and rational action on his part. As agent he was separate from the structure but the structure dominated his ability to act and in fact, it demanded that he act. The structure also set, on its own behalf, the range that Gorbachev’s rational choices could enjoy.

Gorbachev never conceded that the goal of his society and humanity was not communism. Figuring out how to achieve this goal legitimized his position as an agent. Moreover, Gorbachev never stopped reiterating his commitment to this goal. Nor did he ever sign off on any document that used the term “private property,” a term that directly negated the concept of communism. A constructivist understands Gorbachev’s position perfectly well: what was or was not rational for him was determined by the structure in which he was embedded, and not by some apriori quasi natural law.

A society whose apex derives its legitimacy from its relations with other layers provides an equally revealing example of constructivism at work. In the Soviet case, the further down towards the base of the pyramid we move, the more numerous the rules become, and the more flexible and changeable are the strategies and policies they contain (always allowing for consistency with the layers below and above). Occasionally the changes taking place in rules on lower levels percolated up. There was the switch from the “socialism in one country strategy” to “peaceful coexistence,” for example, that Khrushchev inaugurated in 1956. Building on reforms of Khrushchev, Gorbachev’s reforms were bold and far-reaching. They stopped short of the pyramid’s apex, however.

He had to make changes to preserve the social structure. “New thinking” represented changes on behalf of a crippled Soviet superpower that was casting around to survive, let alone remain on the “one true path.” It was a daunting task, not only because of the pitiful condition of the Soviet society and economic system but

because as agent, Gorbachev wore multiple hats. Gorbachev was agent in a multitude of social arrangements; his public statements were addressed simultaneously to a range of constituencies; to the Soviet population, to the communist Party, to his internal foes, to the international community, to Western governments, to Western populations, and to the US administration. Holding supreme agency in the social structure of the Soviet Union and wielding supreme influence through the speech acts and rules, he embodied a number of overlapping social arrangements. The same words conveyed different messages to these different social arrangements, or it was the same message, but it was to serve different rules for different hearers. Sometimes this resulted in misunderstandings. “Glasnost” for example, was intended as a rule addressed to the Soviet work force to overcome alcoholism related absenteeism, to improve working morale and to raise workplace standards. This was to be achieved by encouraging people to “voice” complaints concerning their co-workers and management. This in turn was to improve performance standards in the workforce. When this rule was intercepted in the West it was promptly translated in English, somewhat inaccurately, as “openness,” and taken—quite mistakenly—as an early indication of democratization taking place in the entire Soviet society.

Western observers saw the Soviet superpower as being constrained by the bipolar structure of the cold war. This structure, they believed, allowed Gorbachev to make only certain moves. This missed a large part of the picture, by setting aside the multiple contexts that Gorbachev represented. Space precludes me from developing this line of argument but it is clear that the stress on this or that social structure of which he was an agent, notable in terms of who he was addressing first and foremost at the time, kept changing. In my opinion the tremendous popularity which he received in the West led him to place greater stress on his role as international agent, to the detriment of the other contexts of which he was an agent and which he should have tried to reconcile in terms of rules and speech acts that he made. The concept of “new thinking” holds the key to understanding the rescue strategy he devised on behalf of the Soviet superpower.

### *The “breakthrough”*

Gorbachev certainly made enough noises on this subject to dispel any notion that “new thinking” was just a label. He stressed that “new

thinking” was neither his brainchild nor a product of glasnost. Nor was it a product of free debate amongst Soviet foreign policy specialists. It was not “hastily put together,” the “fruit of improvisation.” It was, he argued, “profoundly considered and nurtured” (*Pravda*, 9 Dec 1988). None of these comments make sense if “new thinking” was what it was taken to be in the West, however.

Gorbachev realized no doubt the tremendously difficult situation in which he found himself and mindful of the central Marxist notion of the unity of theory and practice, he obviously felt the importance of thinking one’s way out of practical problems. In his own words, Gorbachev hazarded all hopes and the future of his country on making a “theoretical breakthrough.” In his view “new thinking” was this theoretical breakthrough.

It is at this point that the utility of my textual analysis of “new thinking” might become apparent. In making this analysis I made a list of ten points. I did not try and decide which one did or did not merit being included, based on my own rational evaluation rather than Gorbachev’s. I did this consistently with constructivist argument that what was or was not “rational” to him was not to be found in Western texts but in his own social structure. That said, it should come as no great surprise that “new thinking,” particularly given the stress on point 10 (p. ) was cast in Marxist terms. Gorbachev knew nothing other, or very little other, than Marxism of the Soviet variety. It takes a very large leap of faith to postulate that Western democratic liberal principles are somehow primordial, and were therefore known to him personally, or that he learned them from his relatively brief exposure to them overseas, and subsequently allowed them to override or supplant his lifelong commitment to and knowledge of Marxism. I would argue, as a consequence, that the historical parallels drawn in the West between Gorbachev and Woodrow Wilson, Olaf Palme, and Willy Brandt, were quite erroneous.

Almost nobody in the West thought of seeing Gorbachev as borrowing from Antonio Gramsci’s ideas about “counter-hegemonic” strategies. The German Sovietologists Berner and Dahm, who did note the unmistakable Gramscian element in Gorbachev’s ideas, trace these influences to that of Soviet apparatchiks assigned to the Communist parties of France and Italy during the (also Gramscian inspired) Eurocommunist years. (Berner and Dahm, 1987). The formal rehabilitation of Gramsci at this time, who had hitherto been viewed in the Soviet Union with suspicion for contradicting Lenin and for being

too popular in the West, is indicative in this regard. Gramsci's popularity in the West ceased to matter under Gorbachev and Gramsci was effectively rehabilitated in the 1980s. His work was translated into Russian, with introductions that stressed its consistency with that of Lenin. My discussions with Soviet defectors have confirmed that work on Gramsci was commissioned in these years in various Soviet think tanks, together with the works of, for example, Jurgen Habermas and the Frankfurt School. It is when considered as a form of Marxism that the extraordinary array of Gorbachev's initiatives begins to fall in place.

In noting the connection with Gramsci, and the use of the concept of counter-hegemony, I am not trying to suggest that Gramsci's Prison Notebooks were Gorbachev's blueprint for saving the Soviet Union. It is important, however, to stress that in the annals of Marxism there did exist a Marxist strategy for dealing with Marxism under duress, and that it makes sense to think that Gorbachev would have availed himself of this strategy's arguments and example. In devising a strategy for Marxists in a weak and defeated situation Gramsci thought that there was a Marxist way to move from the traditional emphasis on overtly coercive class struggles to an emphasis on culture and consciousness instead, and the molding of consensus along lines set by a "historical bloc" of intellectuals. The parallels with Gorbachev's "new thinking" are arguably too obvious to miss.

Gramsci's work, produced in a fascist jail, contained an explanation as to why Bolshevik style revolution did not/could not work in Western Europe in the 1920s. He argued that the approach so successfully adopted by Bolsheviks in their October revolution in Russia in 1917, which he called a "war of position," was condemned to fail in the context in which he lived. As a result he advocated a much more subtle approach, one that combated capitalism using the same mechanisms by which capitalism in Western Europe had established itself, and by which it had made itself immune to the Bolshevik penchant for "going for the jugular". Gramsci suggested a counter-hegemonic strategy instead, one which—once again—was Janus faced and looked a bit like a social democratic/liberal compromise, but was nothing of the sort. He offered an array of methods to penetrate and conquer the "civil society" which—according to Gramsci—was the factor which had so much strengthened capitalism in Europe in the 1920s. In order to break the hegemonic rule of capitalism, Gramsci believed it was necessary to use the same methods by which civil



society itself worked. It was necessary to penetrate (and subvert) its activities, and particularly those of the educational and religious bodies it contained. This was the only method by which capitalism could be conquered. We advanced this thought as a possible Marxist strategy before the adoption of new thinking when we emphasized Gramsci's prescient counsel in regard to the shift from the "war of position" to what he called a "war of maneuver and 'counter-hegemony'..." the only agency he believed to be capable of "restructuring the states-system [as] the Machiavellian Centaur, a mix of coercion and consent, of authority and hegemony, violence and civilization" (1985 and 1989, 203-4).

Let us re-read, in these counter-hegemonic terms, the ten points I identified as summarizing Soviet "new thinking." There is, first of all, the apparently meaningless reference to "world society." Here Gorbachev added—after a complicated debate on the subject in the USSR regarding the compatibility of global and class issues—another "hat" as agent of yet another social structure to the multitude that he already occupied. Global issues were found to be prior to class issues at humanity's present stage, and by stressing these global problems Gorbachev began talking to humanity as a whole, or rather, began talking to what Hedley Bull, for example, understood to be "world society." The Soviets actually used the term "world society," and it is more than likely that they were familiar with its Western usage. I have no reason to believe that they did not follow with great interest Western theories of International Relations: the reason I initially myself came to the West was to study IR theory to see whether it is or it is not compatible with historical materialism. The only difference in the Soviet understanding of world society was that rather than seeing the world bound together in positive terms and by positive values held in common, values that Bull thought were going to be those of modernity, Gorbachev talked in negative terms about the miscellaneous forces threatening the existence of humanity on this planet (see point 1). He saw these global problems as binding humanity into a world society in which the state system and its attendant "old thinking," i.e. Western realism, were rendered obsolete and were downright dangerous, even fatally so.

It is at this point that the relevance of Gorbachev's renunciation of Lenin's theory of imperialism also came in. If Lenin's theory of imperialism—as I argued earlier, in a deliberately simplified way—"ideologized" international relations by vesting states with an ideolo-

gical mission, now the time came to “deideologize” IR. Sovietologists, in my view, took this expression out of context when they took it to mean that the USSR gave up its ideology and its aggressive posture. Hence the significance of the one sentence from the thousands of pages of documents coming from the 27<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress in 1986 (and missed by the Soviet watchers) that said that the “peaceful coexistence of states of different socio economic nature was no longer a form of class struggle.”

Using Einstein’s dictum that the nuclear age needed “new thinking,” Gorbachev tried to reverse the order of the goals set for him by the Marxist principles that informed the social structure in which he lived. Class struggle was always supposed to be the first priority for the proletariat and for the Soviet state, largely because it was assumed that states and the system of states would inevitably collapse once the class structure of Western societies was smashed. Gorbachev reinterpreted historical materialism (removing the Leninist component from the Soviet social structure in the process). He argued that in the light of the global problems threatening humanity’s existence, world society had assumed a greater significance than the class struggle, which he then put in second place. Instead, Gorbachev concluded that the major threat to humanity was the further existence of the states system, with the grant it gave to sovereign states of the legitimate use of violence. Thus in addition to being a Gramscian form of Marxism, “new thinking” was also a theory of international relations which declared the state system to have been effectively superseded by world society. The Soviets tirelessly stressed that they did not any longer mean to be a threat to others. They proposed a reduction in armaments, changes in their strategic doctrine, and eventually complete disarmament, as a way of effectively abolishing the *ultima ratio regnum* of the Westphalian system, with its sovereign states and the legitimacy it gave to the use of violence in IR.

It is at this point that the duality of the sources of Soviet “new thinking,” an innovation unprecedented in the history of Soviet Marxism-Leninism, begins to make sense. In the context of world society “new thinking” was not simply Soviet “new thinking” but “new thinking” was thinking about and of humanity as a whole. Gorbachev’s best-selling in the West book conveyed this in its title: “Perestroika and new thinking for our country and the world” (Gorbachev, 198). The authors of “new thinking” were not just Soviets, but also the Western intellectual elites from whom Gorbachev had

borrowed not only the label “new thinking”, but also most of its content. “New thinking” was the thinking of what Gramsci called the transnational “historical bloc.” It was ostensibly shared by both Soviet and Western intellectuals. This was the breakthrough. The initiative taken by Gorbachev, needless to say, granted him a moral platform from which, despite the weakness of the Soviet superpower, he could espouse a continuing role for it, defined now not in military or economic terms, but in moral terms instead. This was another innovation. Instead of balancing power, the Soviets proposed to balance only interests, another point of the “new thinking.”

Just as it had proved for the Italian CP in the 1930s, the Gramscian model appeared to be the only sensible option for the Soviet Union given the circumstances in the USSR at the time. It was the only way that a weak and failing superpower, with nothing but military muscle to support its geopolitical gains, could go. Gramscian theory moved the issue of conflict and confrontation beyond the power realist promotion of force and the threat of force. It also moved it beyond the usual Western understanding of Soviet propaganda, however. It represented a shift from Gramsci’s war of maneuver to a war of position, the former ultimately assuming invasion and occupation (and being very expensive), the latter targeting societies in their “homes” (and being much less profligate). Thus it is quite correct to say that Gorbachev single-handedly dismantled the cold war structure, as Wendt noted. It is also possible to see why it was in his interest to abolish the Socialist Internationalist (Brezhnev) doctrine, as noted by Kratochwil and Kozłowski (1966) and to set free, in some cases by force, the East European satellites as a way of making more credible his plans to move into “our common European home” a post-territorial notion reminiscent of Deutsch’s security community idea.

Gorbachev never tired of stressing that his wish was not to dissociate himself from his Marxist predecessors or to give up Marxism as the Soviet state ideology. If the Brezhnev line was unMarxist, and a Marxist aberration—as Western Marxist agree—then this was a Marxist renaissance. There was very little of orthodox class or economic determinism in new thinking but that in itself, as Western Marxism bears out, was no proof of the Soviets giving up Marxism. It can be seen instead as an attempt to bring the Soviet variant of Marxism back from its “barrack version” (as Gorbachev called Soviet Marxism-Leninism), towards the Marxism of its estranged Western cousins.

My answer, then, to the question regarding the significance of Soviet “new thinking” and the end of the Cold War is this: the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the disintegration of the social structure called the Soviet Union, were unintended consequences of rational choices that Gorbachev made (because of the complexity and multiplicity of the social arrangements he presided over) in the wrong order or too late. Although he was working on his “new thinking” from the beginning of his agency he was far too slow in that area of his structure that was notoriously weak, namely, the area of nationalities. He had to change the rules for the Soviet federation from directive to commissive ones, dissolve the existing arrangement and allow all Soviet republic to sign a confederative or federative treaty. He planned to do so, but he ran out of time. He left totally unprepared his other constituency, the Soviet population at large. He failed even to begin to change the rules that governed the everyday activities of the population. These were firmly embedded in the existing social structure. Without the support of the commissive rules the changing relationship with Western countries provided, he could not implement domestic alternatives. In my view, this is what left the living legacy (and nightmare) of that social structure, which survives in the successor states everywhere in the former Soviet bloc lending itself to the worst possible abuse in what an increasing number of even Western observers see as a total failure of any transition to a western political and economic model (Cohen, 2000).

To a constructivist the suggestion that Gorbachev was a closet democrat who wanted to reform the Soviet Union and make it a replica of a Western capitalist democratic state, or to give up Marxism in order not to lose the Soviet state’s status as a superpower, makes no sense. The main role of rule-oriented constructivism is not to decry Western triumphalism. The Soviet state is indeed gone, and this no doubt deserves celebration. What rule-oriented constructivism does do is decry the enthusiasm exhibited by the “add on,” fragmentary, and misleading explanations I surveyed earlier in this paper, however. The world is full of other societies whose structures give its agents different kinds of rationality and which might well produce surprises in the future. We were lucky that the Soviet superpower collapsed due mainly to the unintended consequences of a range of policies implementing Soviet “new thinking.” Some voices in the West begin to claim that the rest of the world is still to get to feel these unintended consequences when it is fully appreciated that our policies vis a vis the

Soviet Union and its successor states have been a failure. Whatever happens, next time we may not be so lucky. IR scholars ought to prepare themselves better, so as to handle such a possibility with greater intellectual insight.

Table 1

Neoliberal institutionalism and mainstream constructivism compared

|                                | Neoliberal institutionalism  | Mainstream constructivism  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Framework                      | Both positivists: insisting on empirical testing of propositions /hypotheses against facts   |  |
| New topics and key words       | Both approaches: norms, ideas, learning, identity-formation and transformation (inconsistent with neoliberal premises – <i>identity should be held constant</i> ) institutions, interests.   | constructivism adds: agency, social structure, inter-subjectivity  |
| Ideas are                      | independent variables but limited role, placed within rationalist framework as road maps and preferences in cost- benefit calculations<br>Impact of ideas on objective reality not studied   | Not pure rationalist (cost- benefit calculations) but reflectivist, taking ideas and understandings into account in relation to interests that influence decision making and choice of action<br>Ideas regarded as capable of changing objective reality   |
| States' identity and interests | Rationalist-behavioral, exogenously given by the anarchical (bipolar cold war) material structure which has causal power:<br>USSR as a superpower restricted by the cold war and has to rationally follow these external dictates in its fp, BUT some institutional modifications are possible (by "new thinking") | Identity and interests are endogenous to interaction, i.e. dependent variable, i.e. not given, and therefore can be transformed<br>Anarchy, cold war, structure are socially constructed by collective meanings.<br>Thus states can transform competition into cooperation: " new thinking" could change the superpower game |
| States' rationality            | Yes, maximizing interests or utility   | Yes, once interests are established (through acceptance of ideas and changed identity)<br>Consider also psychological insights   |
| Explanation of social change   |  | Both approaches: the same mechanism/ institutional efficiency and causal logic   |
| Domestic politics              |  | Not studied  |
| Language                       |  | Not studied  |

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## Content

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Triumphalism and its neoliberal<br>and soft constructivist modifications                                    | 9  |
| Neorealism  | 10 |
| Sovietology   | 11 |
| After the USSR's collapse: neoliberal institutionalism,<br>mainstream constructivism and the "new thinking" | 13 |
| Soviet "new thinking" and rule oriented constructivism  | 20 |
| Soviet "new thinking" from the "horse's mouth"  | 21 |
| The duality of the "new thinking"'s sources   | 22 |
| Rule oriented constructivist interpretation   | 25 |
| Soviet ideology   | 26 |
| Gorbachev's social structure  | 28 |
| The "breakthrough"  | 30 |
| Bibliography  | 39 |