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Question

Discuss the main principles of Constructivism in International relations? Give a comparative analysis of constructivism and Realism with examples?

Introduction

The realm of International relations, for centuries, dominated by the theories of realism and liberalism. Nevertheless, after the end of cold war, a new school of thought; constructivism emerged. It emphasized on subjective construction of social event. Social world is of our making. According to them, power, military capabilities, economy have material value and can be explained in term of subjective meanings assigned to

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them. Constructivism contrast with realism, which focused on power politics, anarchic world and egoistic nature of human, while the former focus on norms, values and history rather than characteristics of international system.

Historical background of Constructivism:

For centuries, the domain of IR was dominated by the theories of international relations: Realism and liberalism. But after the end of cold war a new approach emerged constructivism as the former theories could not explain this great shift.

According to Constructivism:

Actors shape and reshape the international affairs not the states or organization.

The Social world is of our making; which means social world is constructed based on subjective interpretations, values, norms, culture and histories by leaders.

Fundamental principles of Constructivism

Constructivism

- Variables of interest e.g. power, military, trade can be explained by subjective meanings given to them.
- Anarchy does not bring peace or war, but relies on how states perceive it; nuclear arsenals of
- UK and North Korea have different significance for USA.
- Aspects of IR are constructed by history and beliefs of leaders.

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World as ^a social construct:

For constructivist world is socially constructed. Military warfare are not important because of their objective reality but because of social meanings assigned to them.

Hundreds of nuclear arsenals of UK are not threatening to US but only five nuclear weapons of North Korea are highly threatening for USA.

Constructivism and Anarchy:

Constructivism disagree with Realism that international system is anarchic and viewed that self-help or competition can not define anarchy. But anarchy depends on how states define it. If states view it in form of cooperation it leads to peace but if state believe on self help it leads

to power competition. Anarchy is what state make of it. So anarchy is formed and changed by states. They have different reactions towards friends and foes.

Constructivist's viewpoint on identities and interests:

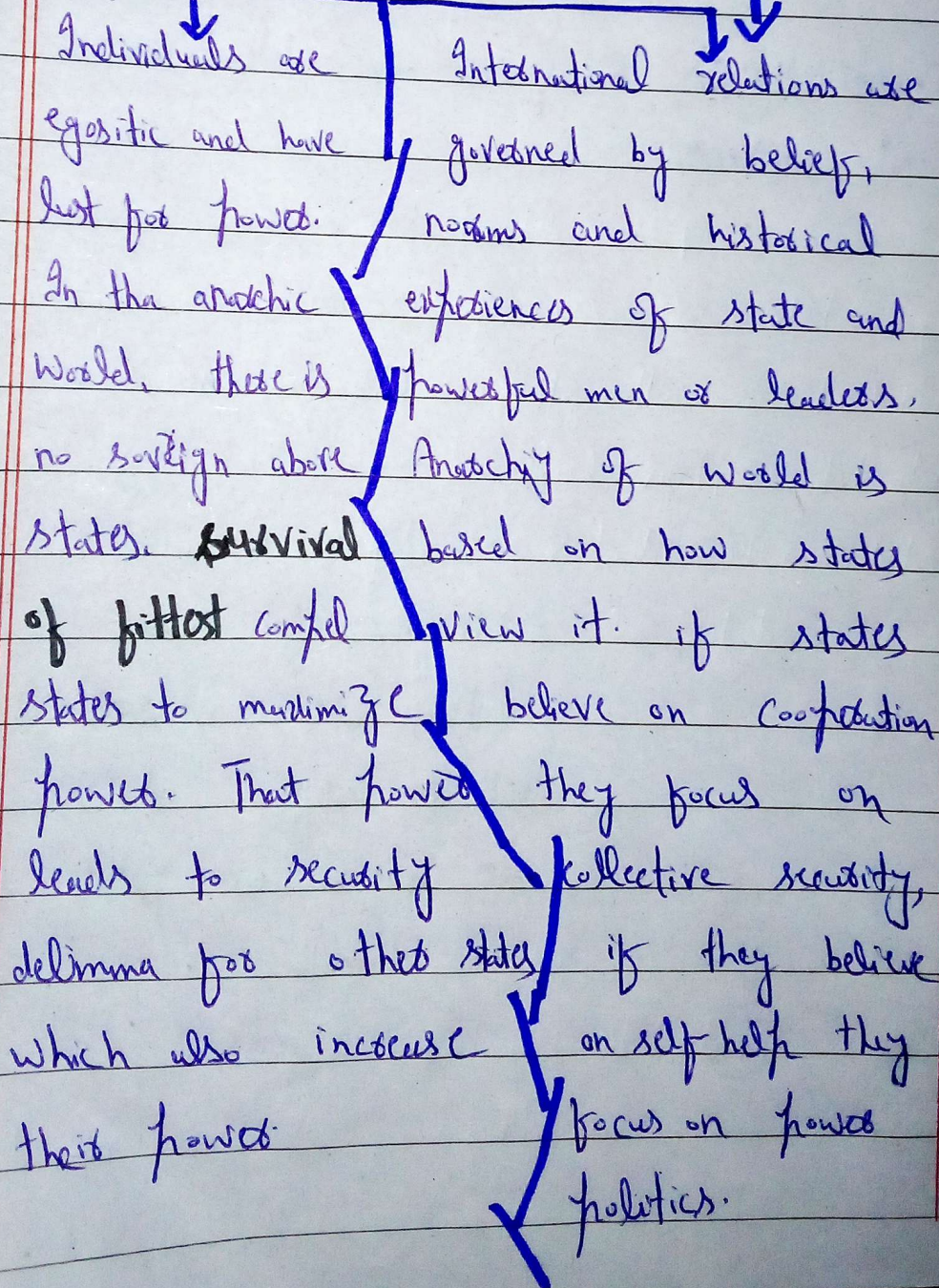
For constructivism, identities of states are socially constructed through interaction with other states. These identities then leads to actions of states. The identities are different of each state. identity of small states based on survival while large states are based on quest for dominance.

These identities then translate into actions at international level.

Comparative Analysis of Realism and Constructivism

Realism

Constructivism



Example:

Fall of Soviet union:

Realism:

view it as
result of economic,
military might of
USA. Soviet Union
could not compete with
USA in term of power
politic and hence
could survive

Constructivism:

The beliefs and
norms of Michael
Gorbachev, SU
leaders are more
important. He was
willing to adopt new
norm of global
cooperation and his
decision led to fall of
SU rather than power
competition of state.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Constructivism
viewed international relations as
outcome of subjective interpretation

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and historical events of states.
states have choices to go to war
or peace. Contrastingly, Realism viewed
states as struggling for power and
hence can go to war for maximizing
their own power and survival.