John J. Mearsheimer: Zu diesem Buch

Kenneth Waltz is one of the great international relations theorists of the twentieth century. He stands squarely in the Realist tradition, which has deep roots in Germany, and which includes among its members Friedrich Meinecke, Hans Morgenthau, and Werner Link, the distinguished scholar who this book honors.

Few scholars can claim to have written one seminal work. Waltz has written three such works, each of which is still widely read and highly influential. Man, the State, and War (1959), which has sold over 100,000 copies, is famous for introducing the notion that the causes of war can be separated into three distinct categories or levels of analysis: the individual, the state, and the international system. Waltz's 1981 monograph, The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better, lays out the argument that nuclear weapons, contrary to the conventional wisdom, make for a more peaceful world, and thus there is little need to worry about nuclear proliferation.

Waltz's most important work, however is Theory of International Politics, which was published a quarter of a century ago in 1979. Since then, it has been central to almost every debate among international relations scholars in the United States, and all indications are that it will continue to occupy that exalted position for the foreseeable future. Waltz argues in Theory of International Politics that politics among nations is best understood by focusing on the structure of the international system, not by focusing on individuals or the domestic politics of the great powers. Specifically, he maintains that international anarchy (the absence of a higher authority that sits above states), coupled with the simple desire of every state to survive, leaves states with no choice but to compete with each other for power. In a world where there is no night watchman that can help a state whose survival might be threatened, it makes sense to have more power than your potential rivals. Why? Because when states are strong the likelihood that other states will attack them is small. Of course, all the states in the system understand this basic logic, which pushes them to compete for power. Simply put, a state's position in the balance of power has profound implications for its prospects for its survival.

Although Waltz certainly believes that states should seek more power rather than less, he also maintains that states should not attempt to maximize their power. Too much power is a bad thing. They should definitely not seek hegemony, but should instead seek an "appropriate amount" of

power. In essence, there are real limits on the severity of the security competition in Waltz's world, which is why he is sometimes labeled a "defensive" realist as opposed to an "offensive" realist.

States should temper their appetite for power, Waltz argues, because of the prevalence of balancing behavior. He maintains that states not only seek power for themselves, but they go to some lengths to check or balance against states that become especially powerful. Balancing coalitions form against states that pursue hegemony and eventually crush them. Waltz's favorite statesman is Otto Von Bismarck, who built a powerful Germany between 1862 and 1870, but then had the good sense to stop expanding before the other European great powers united against Germany. Bismarck's successors were not so prudent, and Germany suffered the consequences in the two World Wars.

There are a handful of other truly important ideas in Theory of International Politics. For example, Waltz argues that bipolar systems are more peaceful than multipolar systems, and he maintains that economic interdependence makes conflict among the entangled states more rather than less likely. Both of these claims are at odds with well-entrenched conventional wisdoms.

Waltz also introduces the important distinction between "internal" and "external" balancing, as well as the more general distinction between "balancing" and "bandwagoning." He makes the case that great powers hardly ever bandwagon, i.e., join forces with states that are winning wars and gaining power. Instead they balance against those rising powers, because that is the best way to survive under international anarchy. Finally, he makes the controversial argument that cooperation among states is difficult because of their concerns about "relative gains." States find it difficult to cut deals, according to Waltz, because they worry greatly that the other side will gain a bigger share of the pie and shift the balance of power in their favor.

Despite Waltz's pervasive influence, many students of international politics reject his arguments. He was one of a small and lonely band when he first voiced his early opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam in 1964. His arguments about the effects of nuclear proliferation have never been popular. His calls during the Cold War for U.S. defense cuts and for American restraints overseas did not win the day. He also spoke out against the recent Iraq war (2003), which was not a popular position in the United States before that conflict started. The Realism that infuses his work remains a minority view among IR scholars. Liberalism is the American

credo; Realism is the lesser tendency. Waltz's Realist stance had always had him sailing against prevailing Liberal winds. Yet Waltz never shied from challenging conventional wisdoms and from making arguments that few accepted, at least at first.

Accepted or not, Waltz's ideas have had remarkable staying power. The reason is simple. We still live in world where states face threats from foreign adversaries, and where, the best efforts of the United Nations notwithstanding, there is still no ultimate arbiter that states can turn to in a crisis. Therefore it behooves those who think seriously about world politics be they German or American to grapple with Waltz's ideas and figure out why they agree or disagree with them. Those who ignore his theory do so at their own peril.

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