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## INTRODUCTION

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Although the intellectual roots of the realist tradition stretch back for millennia, the birth of “realism” as a school of thought in the modern discipline of international relations (IR) can be traced most directly to the post–WWII writings of Hans Morgenthau. In his *Politics among Nations* (Reading 2.1), Morgenthau adopts the label of “realism” for his theory of international politics because he sought to explain the world as it really is, in contrast to the “idealism” of interwar Wilsonian liberalism that was optimistic about the prospects for international cooperation. In Morgenthau’s “classical realist” treatment, state behavior is motivated by the pursuit of maximum power: power is the overarching interest of all states and statesmen and is the only metric by which policy should be judged. Anticipating the emergence of political analysis as science, Morgenthau believed that state behavior—in particular the quest for power—was rooted in objective laws grounded in human nature. Echoing Thomas Hobbes centuries before, the first generation of realists asserted that humankind’s innate greed and lust for power motivated states to seek power in an anarchic international system where there is no overarching world government exercising authority above states.

Building on Morgenthau’s work, a later generation of realists would develop a different take on states’ pursuit of power that drew inspiration from classical realism but offered new and important insights about the motivations of state behavior. Led by Kenneth Waltz, these theorists adopted the label of “neorealism” for their theoretical perspective, emphasizing both the similarities and differences with classical realism. Unlike classical realism, neorealist theories of international relations assume that references to human nature are unnecessary in explaining why states pursue power. Rather, state behavior can be traced back to the structure of the international system, which is why neorealism is sometimes referred to as “structural realism.” That structure, according to prominent realists like Waltz (Reading 2.2) and Mearsheimer (Reading 2.3) is one of anarchy. “Anarchy” in international relations usage does not mean “chaotic”; rather, it simply means that there is no higher power that exercises authority over the sovereign states in the international system. In other words, there is no world government with the power to make the rules, enforce the rules, and punish those states that break the rules.

In such an anarchic system, sometimes called a “self-help system,” states must fend for themselves in a game where the stakes are high, up to and including their very survival. According to neorealism, states seek power not because they are motivated by human

attributes like greed or lust but because power is a particularly useful means of generating security for one's self. As such, Waltz argued that states did not necessarily seek maximum power (as classical realists thought), but rather an appropriate amount of power in order to maximize security. In doing so, he recognized that a state could pursue or acquire too much power, thereby provoking a counterbalancing coalition among its adversaries and actually undermining its security. For this reason, Waltz's variant of neorealism is sometimes referred to as "defensive realism" since it assumes some restraint in a state's pursuit of power. This contrasts with the "offensive realist" branch of neorealism, typified by Mearsheimer's work (Reading 2.3), which argues that because it is impossible for states to know with certainty how much power is "enough," great powers seek maximum power—also known as "hegemony"—in order to guarantee their security and survival.

Though they might disagree on how much power is enough for a state to feel secure, realists new and old agree that "security" is a scarce resource that is viewed as zero-sum by states struggling for survival. More security for my state means less security for yours, a logic known as the "security dilemma" that is explored in greater detail in Reading 6.1 by Robert Jervis. This, according to neorealism, is the engine that drives the eternal struggle that is international politics: as some states gain in power and security, others are threatened by these shifts in the balance of relative power, prompting them to enhance their own security at the expense of others. This process, sometimes referred to as balance of power politics, is explored in Reading 2.4 by Stephen Walt, who analyzes the conditions under which states form alliances to balance against (or sometimes bandwagon with) powerful and threatening states.

One of the most important insights that neorealists brought to the study of international relations was that because all states exist in the anarchic international system and all states (presumably) seek to survive, the logic described above exerts a strong force on the behavior of all states, regardless of their domestic characteristics or the characteristics of individual leaders. Thus, neorealists treat states as "black boxes," inside which it is unnecessary to delve in order to understand why states do what they do. All states, whether large or small, rich or poor, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist must play "balance of power politics" or risk being wiped off the map.

But what of ethics and morality in such an "eat or be eaten" anarchic international system? Long before Morgenthau, Waltz, and Mearsheimer, there was Thucydides, the ancient Athenian historian and general whose *History of the Peloponnesian War* is an enduring classic from which scholars of international relations draw lessons to this day. Though some argue that Thucydides has been mislabeled as the "father of political realism" based on a wider reading of his broader work, there can be no doubt that the Athenian position presented in the famous "Melian Dialogue" (Reading 2.5) embodies realist thinking par excellence. Demanding that the island of Melos declare its allegiance to Athens, the Athenians deliver a stark warning that "you're either with us or against us" (to use modern parlance). The Melian leadership protests on various grounds: Athens' coercion is unjust, it is a violation of Melian neutrality, and threatens Athens' long-term interests. But despite these protestations, the Athenians reply with one of the most notorious declarations in the history of international relations: "right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." In this view, there is no such thing as justice or morality in international politics: any and all means are justified in the

pursuit of power. The Athenian perspective informs contemporary normative debates over whether moral standards should be applied to judge the actions of states in the international system, and if so whether such ethical constraints can or should constrain state behavior. Moral skepticism in international relations, as articulated by the Athenians at Milos and reaffirmed by many modern-day realists replies with a definitive “no.”

Stepping back, it is important to note that theories within the realist tradition offer compelling, elegant, and parsimonious explanations for important phenomena in international relations: why states pursue power, why they regularly engage in balancing behavior, why there is constant competition for security, and why war is always a possibility. Some realist theories (not included in this volume) can explain why certain distributions of power among great powers are more war prone than others. But beyond the case of balancing and bandwagoning alliances, realism does not offer satisfying explanations for why states often cooperate to mutual benefit, especially in economic activities like trade. For that, readers are directed to chapter 3 and its exploration of the liberal tradition.

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

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1. What is “anarchy” in the international system?
2. Why, according to classical realists like Morgenthau (Reading 2.1), do states seek power in the international system? How does this differ from the explanation offered by neorealists like Waltz and Mearsheimer?
3. According to neorealists (sometimes called “structural realists”) like Waltz and Mearsheimer, how does the structure of the international system influence state behavior?
4. Why, according to neorealists, does anarchy compel different types of states to behave similarly?
5. What is “power,” and how much is “enough” power according to classical realists? How much power is enough according to defensive neorealists like Waltz (Reading 2.2)? How much power is enough according to offensive neorealists like Mearsheimer (Reading 2.3)?
6. What is the difference between security and power?
7. What is the realist view of morality in international relations?
8. Under what conditions do states cooperate according to realists?
9. How does Walt’s “balance of threat” theory differ from traditional “balance of power” theory (Reading 2.4)? What are the four sources of threat that influence a state’s balancing behavior?
10. Why do states tend to prefer to balance against the most threatening state rather than bandwagon with threatening states?

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## FURTHER READING

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# Reading 2.1

## A Realist Theory of International Politics

Hans J. Morgenthau

This book purports to present a theory of international politics. The test by which such a theory must be judged is not a priori and abstract but empirical and pragmatic. The theory, in other words, must be judged not by some preconceived abstract principle or concept unrelated to reality but by its purpose: to bring order and meaning to a mass of phenomena that without it would remain disconnected and unintelligible. It must meet a dual test, an empirical and a logical one: do the facts as they actually are lend themselves to the interpretation the theory has put upon them, and do the conclusions at which the theory arrives follow with logical necessity from its premises? In short, is the theory consistent with the facts and within itself?

The issue this theory raises concerns the nature of all politics. The history of modern political thought is the story of a contest between two schools that differ fundamentally in their conceptions of the nature of man, society, and politics. One believes that a rational and moral political order, derived from universally valid abstract principles, can be achieved here and now. It assumes the essential goodness and infinite malleability of human nature and blames the failure of the social order to measure up to the rational standards on lack of knowledge and understanding, obsolescent social institutions, or the depravity of certain isolated individuals or groups. It trusts in education, reform, and the sporadic use of force to remedy these defects.

The other school believes that the world, imperfect as it is from the rational point of view, is the result of forces inherent in human nature. To improve the

world one must work with those forces, not against them. This being inherently a world of opposing interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully realized but must at best be approximated through the ever temporary balancing of interests and the ever precarious settlement of conflicts. This school, then, sees in a system of checks and balances a universal principle for all pluralist societies. It appeals to historical precedent rather than to abstract principles and aims at the realization of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good.

This theoretical concern with human nature as it actually is, and with the historical processes as they actually take place, has earned for the theory presented here the name of *realism*. What are the tenets of political realism? No systematic exposition of the philosophy of political realism can be attempted here; it will suffice to single out six fundamental principles, which have frequently been misunderstood.

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### SIX PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL REALISM

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1. Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature. In order to improve society, it is first necessary to understand the laws by which society lives. The operation of these laws being impervious to our preferences, men will challenge them only at the risk of failure.

Realism, believing as it does in the objectivity of the laws of politics, must also believe in the possibility of developing a rational theory that reflects,

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Source: Hans Morgenthau. "A Realist Theory of International Politics." In *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 7th ed. McGraw Hill, 2006.

however imperfectly and one-sidedly, these objective laws. It believes also, then, in then in the possibility of distinguishing in politics between truth and opinion; between what is true objectively and rationally, supported by evidence and illuminated by reason; and what is only a subjective judgment, divorced from the facts as they are and, informed by prejudice and wishful thinking.

For realism, theory consists in ascertaining facts and giving them meaning through reason. It assumes that the character of a foreign policy can be ascertained only through the examination of the political acts performed and of the foreseeable consequences of these acts. Thus we can find out what statesmen have actually done, and from the foreseeable consequences of their acts, we can surmise what their objectives might have been.

Yet examination of the facts is not enough. To give meaning to the factual raw material of foreign policy, we must approach political reality with a kind of rational outline, a map that suggests to us the possible meanings of foreign policy. In other words, we put ourselves in the position of a statesman who must meet a certain problem of foreign policy under certain circumstances, and we ask ourselves what the rational alternatives are from which a statesman may choose who must meet this problem under these circumstances (presuming always that he acts in a rational manner), and which of these rational alternatives this particular statesman, acting under these circumstances, is likely to choose. It is the testing of this rational hypothesis against the actual facts and their consequences that gives theoretical meaning to the facts of international politics.

2. The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power. This concept provides the link between reason trying to understand international politics and the facts to be understood.

We assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power, and the evidence of history bears out that assumption. That assumption

allows us to retrace and anticipate, as it were, the steps a statesman—past, present, or future—has taken or will take on the political scene. We look over his shoulder when he writes his dispatches; we listen in on his conversations with other statesmen; we read and anticipate his very thoughts. Thinking in terms of interest defined as power, we think as he does, and as disinterested observers we understand his thoughts and actions perhaps better than he, the actor on the political scene, does himself.

The concept of interest defined as power imposes intellectual discipline upon the observer, infuses rational order into the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible. A realist theory of international politics, then, will guard against two popular fallacies: the concern with motives and the concern with ideological preferences.

Yet even if we had access to the real motives of statesmen, that knowledge would help us little in understanding foreign policies and might well lead us astray. It is true that the knowledge of the statesman's motives may give us one among many clues as to what the direction of his foreign policy might be. It cannot give us, however, the one clue by which to predict his foreign policies. History shows no exact and necessary correlation between the quality of motives and the quality of foreign policy. This is true in both moral and political terms.

We cannot conclude from the good intentions of a statesman that his foreign policies will be either morally praiseworthy or politically successful. Judging his motives, we can say that he will not intentionally pursue policies that are morally wrong, but we can say nothing about the probability of their success. If we want to know the moral and political qualities of his actions, we must know them, not his motives. How often have statesmen been motivated by the desire to improve the world and ended by making it worse? And how often have they sought one goal and ended by achieving something they neither expected nor desired?

Neville Chamberlain's politics of appeasement were, as far as we can judge, inspired by

good motives; he was probably less motivated by considerations of personal power than were many other British prime ministers, and he sought to preserve peace and to assure the happiness of all concerned. Yet his policies helped to make the Second World War inevitable and to bring untold miseries to millions of people. Sir Winston Churchill's motives, on the other hand, were much less universal in scope and much more narrowly directed toward personal and national power, yet the foreign policies that sprang from these inferior motives were certainly superior in moral and political quality to those pursued by his predecessor. Judged by his motives, Robespierre was one of the most virtuous men who ever lived. Yet it was the utopian radicalism of that very virtue that made him kill those less virtuous than himself, brought him to the scaffold, and destroyed the revolution of which he was a leader.

Good motives give assurance against deliberately bad policies; they do not guarantee the moral goodness and political success of the policies they inspire. What is important to know, if one wants to understand foreign policy, is not primarily the motives of a statesman but his intellectual ability to comprehend the essentials of foreign policy, as well as his political ability to translate what he has comprehended into successful political action. It follows that, while ethics in the abstract judges the moral qualities of motives, political theory must judge the political qualities of intellect, will, and action.

A realist theory of international politics will also avoid the other popular fallacy of equating the foreign policies of a statesman with his philosophic or political sympathies and of deducing the former from the latter. Statesmen, especially under, contemporary conditions, may well make a habit of presenting their foreign policies in terms of their philosophic and political sympathies in order to gain popular support for them. Yet they will distinguish with Lincoln between their "*official duty*," which is to think and act in terms of the national interest, and their "*personal wish*," which is to see their own moral values and political principles

realized throughout the world. Political realism does not require, nor does it condone, indifference to political ideals and moral principles, but it requires indeed a sharp distinction between the desirable and the possible—between what is desirable everywhere and at all times and what is possible under the concrete circumstances of time and place.

On the international plane, it is no exaggeration to say that the very structure of international relations—as reflected in political institutions, diplomatic procedures, and legal arrangements—has tended to become at variance with, and in large measure irrelevant to, the reality of international politics. While the former assumes the "sovereign equality" of all nations, the latter is dominated by an extreme inequality of nations, two of which are called "superpowers" because they hold in their hands the unprecedented power of total destruction, and many of which are called "ministates" because their power is minuscule even compared with that of the traditional nation-states. It is this contrast and incompatibility between the reality of international politics and the concepts, institutions, and procedures designed to make intelligible and control the former that have caused, at least below the great-power level, the unmanageability of international relations, which borders on anarchy. International terrorism and the different government reactions to it, the involvement of foreign governments in the Lebanese civil war, the military operations of the United States in Southeast Asia, and the military intervention of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe cannot be explained or justified by reference to traditional concepts, institutions, and procedures.

The difference between international politics as it actually is and a rational theory derived from it is like the difference between a photograph and a painted portrait. The photograph shows everything that can be seen by the naked eye; the painted portrait does not show everything that can be seen by the naked eye, but it shows, or at least seeks to show, one thing that the naked eye cannot see: the human essence of the person portrayed.

Political realism contains not only a theoretical but also a normative element. It knows that political reality is replete with contingencies and systemic irrationalities, and points to the typical influences they exert upon foreign policy. Yet it shares with all social theory the need, for the sake of theoretical understanding, to stress the rational elements of political reality; for it is these rational elements that make reality intelligible for theory. Political realism presents the theoretical construct of a rational foreign policy that experience can never completely achieve.

At the same time, political realism considers a rational foreign policy to be good foreign policy, for only a rational foreign policy minimizes risks and maximizes benefits and, hence, complies with both the moral precept of prudence and the political requirement of success. Political realism wants the photographic picture of the political world to resemble as much as possible its painted portrait. Aware of the inevitable gap between good—that is, rational—foreign policy and foreign policy as it actually is, political realism maintains not only that theory must focus upon the rational elements of political reality but also that foreign policy ought to be rational in view of its own moral and practical purposes.

Hence, it is no argument against the theory here presented that actual foreign policy does not or cannot live up to it. That argument misunderstands the intention of this book, which is to present not an indiscriminate description of political reality but a rational theory of international politics. Far from being invalidated by the fact that, for instance, a perfect balance of power policy will scarcely be found in reality, it assumes that reality, being deficient in this respect, must be understood and evaluated as an approximation to an ideal system of balance of power.

3. Realism assumes that its key concept of interest defined as power is an objective category that is universally valid, but it does not endow that concept with a meaning that is fixed once and for

all. The idea of interest is indeed of the essence of politics and is unaffected by the circumstances of time and place.

Yet the kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history depends upon the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated. The goals that might be pursued by nations in their foreign policy can run the whole gamut of objectives any nation has ever pursued or might possibly pursue.

The same observations apply to the concept of power. Its content and the manner of its use are determined by the political and cultural environment. Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man. Thus power covers all social relationships that serve that end, from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another. Power covers the domination of man by man, both when it is disciplined by moral ends and controlled by constitutional safeguards, as in Western democracies, and when it is that untamed and barbaric force that finds its laws in nothing but its own strength and its sole justification in its aggrandizement.

The realist parts company with other schools of thought before the all-important question of how the contemporary world is to be transformed. The realist is persuaded that this transformation can be achieved only through the workmanlike manipulation of the perennial forces that have shaped the past as they will the future. The realist cannot be persuaded that we can bring about that transformation by confronting a political reality that has its own laws with an abstract ideal that refuses to take those laws into account.

4. Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action. It is also aware of the ineluctable tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action. And it is unwilling to gloss over and obliterate that tension and thus to obfuscate both the moral and the political issues by making it appear as though the stark facts of politics were morally more



satisfying than they actually are, and the moral law less exacting than it actually is.

Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place. The individual may say for himself, "*Fiat justitia, pereat mundus* (Let justice be done, even if the world perish)," but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care. Both individual and state must judge political action by universal moral principles, such as that of liberty. Yet while the individual has a moral right to sacrifice himself in defense of such a moral principle, the state has no right to let its moral disapprobation of the infringement of liberty get in the way of successful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival. There can be no political morality without prudence, that is, without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action. Realism, then, considers prudence—the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions—to be the supreme virtue in politics. Ethics in the abstract judges action by its conformity with the moral law; political ethics judges action by its political consequences.

5. Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe. As it distinguishes between truth and opinion, so it distinguishes between truth and idolatry. All nations are tempted—and few have been able to resist the temptation for long—to clothe their own particular aspirations and actions in the moral purposes of the universe. To know that nations are subject to the moral law is one thing, while to pretend to know with certainty what is good and evil in the relations among nations is quite another. There is a world of difference between the belief that all nations stand under the judgment of God, inscrutable to the human mind, and the blasphemous conviction that God is always on one's side and

that what one wills oneself cannot fail to be willed by God also.

The lighthearted equation between a particular nationalism and the counsels of Providence is morally indefensible, for it is that very sin of pride against which the Greek tragedians and the biblical prophets have warned rulers and ruled. That equation is also politically pernicious, for it is liable to engender the distortion in judgment that, in the blindness of crusading frenzy, destroys nations and civilizations—in the name of moral principle, ideal, or God himself.

On the other hand, it is exactly the concept of interest defined in terms of power that saves us from both that moral excess and that political folly. For if we look at all nations, our own included, as political entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power, we are able to do justice to all of them. And we are able to do justice to all of them in a dual sense: we are able to judge other nations as we judge our own and, having judged them in this fashion, we are then capable of pursuing policies that respect the interests of other nations while protecting and promoting those of our own. Moderation in policy cannot fail to reflect the moderation of moral judgment.

6. The difference, then, between political realism and other schools of thought is real, and it is profound. However much of the theory of political realism may have been misunderstood and misinterpreted, there is no gainsaying its distinctive intellectual and moral attitude to matters political. Intellectually, the political realist maintains the autonomy of the political sphere, as the economist, the lawyer, the moralist maintain theirs. He thinks in terms of interest defined as power, as the economist thinks in terms of interest defined as wealth; the lawyer, of the conformity of action with legal rules; the moralist, of the conformity of action with moral principles. The economist asks, "How does this policy affect the wealth of society, or a segment of it?" The lawyer asks, "Is this policy in accord with the rules of law?" The moralist

asks, "Is this policy in accord with moral principles?" And the political realist asks, "How does this policy affect the power of the nation?" (Or of the federal government, of Congress, of the party, of agriculture, as the case may be.)

The political realist is not unaware of the existence and the relevance of standards of thought other than political ones. As a political realist, he cannot but subordinate these other standards to those of politics. And he parts company with other schools when they impose standards of thought appropriate to other spheres upon the political spheres. It is here that political realism takes issue with the "legalistic-moralistic approach" to international politics. This realist defense of the autonomy of the political sphere against its subversion by other modes of thought does not imply disregard for the existence and importance of these other modes of thought. It rather implies that each should be assigned its proper sphere and function. Political realism is based upon a pluralistic conception of human nature. Real man is a composite of "economic man," "political man," "moral man," "religious man," etc. A man who was nothing but "political man" would be a beast, for he would be completely lacking in moral restraints. A man who was nothing but "moral man" would be a fool,

for he would be completely lacking in prudence. A man who was nothing but "religious man" would be a saint, for he would be completely lacking in worldly desires.

Recognizing that these different facets of human nature exist, political realism also recognizes that in order to understand one of them one has to deal with it on its own terms. That is to say, if I want to understand "religious man," I must for the time being abstract from the other aspects of human nature and deal with its religious aspect as if it were the only one. Furthermore, I must apply to the religious sphere the standards of thought appropriate to it, always remaining aware of the existence of other standards and their actual influence upon the religious qualities of man. What is true of this facet of human nature is true of all the others. No modern economist, for instance, would conceive of his science and its relations to other sciences of man in any other way. It is exactly through such a process of emancipation from other standards of thought, and the development of one appropriate to its subject matter, that economics has developed as an autonomous theory of the economic activities of man. To contribute to a similar development in the field of politics is indeed the purpose of political realism.

## Reading 2.2

# The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory

Kenneth N. Waltz

Like most historians, many students of international politics have been skeptical about the possibility of creating a theory that might help one to understand and explain the international events that interest us. Thus Morgenthau, foremost among traditional realists, was fond of repeating Blaise Pascal's remark that "the history of the world would have been different had Cleopatra's nose been a bit shorter" and then asking "How do you systemize that?"<sup>1</sup> His appreciation of the role of the accidental and the occurrence of the unexpected in politics dampened his theoretical ambition.

The response of neorealists is that, although difficulties abound, some of the obstacles that seem most daunting lie in misapprehensions about theory. Theory obviously cannot explain the accidental or account for unexpected events; it deals in regularities and repetitions and is possible only if these can be identified. A further difficulty is found in the failure of realists to conceive of international politics as a distinct domain about which theories can be fashioned. Morgenthau, for example, insisted on "the autonomy of politics," but he failed to apply the concept to international politics. A theory is a depiction of the organization of a domain and of the connections among its parts. A theory indicates that some factors are more important than others and specifies relations among them. In reality, everything is related to everything else, and one domain cannot be separated from others. But theory isolates one realm from all others in order to

deal with it intellectually. By defining the structure of international political systems, neorealism establishes the autonomy of international politics and thus makes a theory about it possible.<sup>2</sup>

In developing a theory of international politics, neorealism retains the main tenets of *realpolitik*, but means and ends are viewed differently, as are causes and effects. Morgenthau, for example, thought of the "rational" statesman as ever striving to accumulate more and more power. He viewed power as an end in itself. Although he acknowledged that nations at times act out of considerations other than power, Morgenthau insisted that, when they do so, their actions are not "of a political nature."<sup>3</sup> In contrast, neorealism sees power as a possibly useful means, with states running risks if they have either too little or too much of it. Excessive weakness may invite an attack that greater strength would have dissuaded an adversary from launching. Excessive strength may prompt other states to increase their arms and pool their efforts against the dominant state. Because power is a possibly useful means, sensible statesmen try to have an appropriate amount of it. In crucial situations, however, the ultimate concern of states is not for power but for security. This revision is an important one.

An even more important revision is found in a shift of causal relations. The infinite materials of any realm can be organized in endlessly different ways. Realism thinks of causes as moving in

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Source: Kenneth N. Waltz. "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988).

only one direction, from the interactions of individuals and states to the outcomes that their acts and interactions produce. Morgenthau recognized that, when there is competition for scarce goods and no one to serve as arbiter, a struggle for power will ensue among the competitors and that consequently the struggle for power can be explained without reference to the evil born in men. The struggle for power arises simply because men want things, not because of the evil in their desires. He labeled man's desire for scarce goods as one of the two roots of conflict, but, even while discussing it, he seemed to pull toward the "other root of conflict and concomitant evil"—"the *animus dominandi*, the desire for power." He often considered that man's drive for power is more basic than the chance conditions under which struggles for power occur. This attitude is seen in his statement that "in a world where power counts, no nation pursuing a rational policy has a choice between renouncing and wanting power; and, if it could, the lust for power for the individual's sake would still confront us with its less spectacular yet no less pressing moral defects."<sup>4</sup>

Students of international politics have typically inferred outcomes from salient attributes of the actors producing them. Thus Marxists, like liberals, have linked the outbreak of war or the prevalence of peace to the internal qualities of states. Governmental forms, economic systems, social institutions, political ideologies—these are but a few examples of where the causes of war have been found. Yet, although causes are specifically assigned, we know that states with widely divergent economic institutions, social customs, and political ideologies have all fought wars. More striking still, many different sorts of organizations fight wars, whether those organizations be tribes, petty principalities, empires, nations, or street gangs. If an identified condition seems to have caused a given war, one must wonder why wars occur repeatedly even though their causes vary. Variations in the characteristics of the states are not linked directly to the outcomes that their behaviors produce, nor are variations in their patterns of interaction. Many historians, for example, have claimed that

World War I was caused by the interaction of two opposed and closely balanced coalitions. But then many have claimed that World War II was caused by the failure of some states to combine forces in an effort to right an imbalance of power created by an existing alliance.

Neorealism contends that international politics can be understood only if the effects of structure are added to the unit-level explanations of traditional realism. By emphasizing how structures affect actions and outcomes, neorealism rejects the assumption that man's innate lust for power constitutes a sufficient cause of war in the absence of any other. It reconceives the causal link between interacting units and international outcomes. According to the logic of international politics, one must believe that some causes of international outcomes are the result of interactions at the unit level, and, since variations in presumed causes do not correspond very closely to variations in observed outcomes, one must also assume that others are located at the structural level. Causes at the level of units interact with those at the level of structure, and, because they do so, explanation at the unit level alone is bound to be misleading. If an approach allows the consideration of both unit-level and structural-level causes, then it can cope with both the changes and the continuities that occur in a system.

Structural realism presents a systemic portrait of international politics depicting component units according to the manner of their arrangement. For the purpose of developing a theory, states are cast as unitary actors wanting at least to survive, and are taken to be the system's constituent units. The essential structural quality of the system is anarchy—the absence of a central monopoly of legitimate force. Changes of structure and hence of system occur with variations in the number of great powers. The range of expected outcomes is inferred from the assumed motivation of the units and the structure of the system in which they act.

A systems theory of international politics deals with forces at the international, and not at the national, level. With both systems-level and unit-level forces in play, how can one construct a theory

of international politics without simultaneously constructing a theory of foreign policy? An international-political theory does not imply or require a theory of foreign policy any more than a market theory implies or requires a theory of the firm. Systems theories, whether political or economic, are theories that explain how the organization of a realm acts as a constraining and disposing force on the interacting units within it. Such theories tell us about the forces to which the units are subjected. From them, we can draw some inferences about the expected behavior and fate of the units: namely, how they will have to compete with and adjust to one another if they are to survive and flourish. To the extent that the dynamics of a system limit the freedom of its units, their behavior and the outcomes of their behavior become predictable. How do we expect firms to respond to differently structured markets, and states to differently structured international-political systems? These theoretical questions require us to take firms as firms, and states as states, without paying attention to differences among them. The questions are then answered by reference to the placement of the units in their system and not by reference to the internal qualities of the units. Systems theories explain why different units behave similarly and, despite their variations, produce outcomes that fall within expected ranges. Conversely, theories at the unit level tell us why different units behave differently despite their similar placement in a system. A theory about foreign policy is a theory at the national level. It leads to expectations about the responses that dissimilar polities will make to external pressures. A theory of international politics bears on the foreign policies of nations although it claims to explain only certain aspects of them. It can tell us what international conditions national policies have to cope with.

From the vantage point of neorealist theory, competition and conflict among states stem directly from the twin facts of life under conditions of anarchy: States in an anarchic order must provide for their own security, and threats or seeming threats to their security abound. Preoccupation

with identifying dangers and counteracting them become a way of life. Relations remain tense; the actors are usually suspicious and often hostile even though by nature they may not be given to suspicion and hostility. Individually, states may only be doing what they can to bolster their security. Their individual intentions aside, collectively their actions yield arms races and alliances. The uneasy state of affairs is exacerbated by the familiar “security dilemma,” wherein measures that enhance one state’s security typically diminish that of others.<sup>5</sup> In an anarchic domain, the source of one’s own comfort is the source of another’s worry. Hence a state that is amassing instruments of war, even for its own defensive, is cast by others as a threat requiring response. The response itself then serves to confirm the first state’s belief that it had reason to worry. Similarly an alliance that in the interest of defense moves to increase cohesion among its members and add to its ranks inadvertently imperils an opposing alliance and provokes countermeasures.

Some states may hunger for power for power’s sake. Neorealist theory, however, shows that it is not necessary to assume an innate lust for power in order to account for the sometimes fierce competition that marks the international arena. In an anarchic domain, a state of war exists if all parties lust for power. But so too will a state of war exist if all states seek only to ensure their own safety.

Although neorealist theory does not explain why particular wars are fought, it does explain war’s dismal recurrence through the millennia. Neorealists point not to the ambitions or the intrigues that punctuate the outbreak of individual conflicts but instead to the existing structure within which events, whether by design or accident, can precipitate open clashes of arms. The origins of hot wars lie in cold wars, and the origins of cold wars are found in the anarchic ordering of the international arena.

The recurrence of war is explained by the structure of the international system. Theorists explain what historians know: war is normal. Any given war is explained not by looking at the structure

of the international-political system but by looking at the particularities within it: the situations, the characters, and the interactions of states. Although particular explanations are found at the unit level, general explanations are also needed. Wars vary in frequency, and in other ways as well. A central question for a structural theory is this: how do changes of the system affect the expected frequency of war?

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Wars, hot and cold, originate in the structure of the international political system. Most Americans blame the Soviet Union for creating the Cold War, by the actions that follow necessarily from the nature of its society and government. Revisionist historians, attacking the dominant view, assign blame to the United States. Some American error or sinister interest or faulty assumption about Soviet aims, they argue, is what started the Cold War. Either way, the main point is lost. In a bipolar world, each of the two great powers is bound to

focus its fears on the other, to distrust its motives, and to impute offensive intentions to defensive measures. The proper question is what, not who, started the Cold War. Although its content and virulence vary as unit-level forces change and interact, the Cold War continues. It is firmly rooted in the structure of postwar international politics, and will last as long as that structure endures.

In any closely competitive system, it may seem that one is either paranoid or a loser. The many Americans who ascribe paranoia to the Soviet Union are saying little about its political elite and much about the international-political system. Yet, in the presence of nuclear weapons, the Cold War has not become a hot one, a raging war among major states. Constraints on fighting big wars have bound the major nuclear states into a system of uneasy peace. Hot wars originate in the structure of international politics. So does the Cold War, with its temperature kept low by the presence of nuclear weapons.

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## NOTES

1. Hans J. Morgenthau, "International Relations: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches," in Norman D. Palmer (ed.), *A Design for International Relations Research: Scope, Theory, Methods, and Relevance* (Philadelphia, 1970), 78.
2. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations* (New York, 1973; 5th ed.), 11. Ludwig Boltzman (trans. Rudolf Weingartner), "Theories as Representations," excerpted in Arthur Danto and Sidney Morgenbesser (eds.), *Philosophy of Science* (Cleveland, 1960), 245–252. Neorealism is sometimes dubbed structural
3. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 27.
4. *Idem*, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago, 1946), 192, 200. Italics added.
5. See John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, II (1950), 157–180.

# Reading 2.3

## Anarchy and the Struggle for Power

John Mearsheimer

Great powers, I argue, are always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal. This perspective does not allow for status quo powers, except for the unusual state that achieves preponderance. Instead, the system is populated with great powers that have revisionist intentions at their core.<sup>1</sup> This [reading] presents a theory that explains this competition for power. Specifically, I attempt to show that there is a compelling logic behind my claim that great powers seek to maximize their share of world power. I do not, however, test offensive realism against the historical record in this [reading].

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### WHY STATES PURSUE POWER

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My explanation for why great powers vie with each other for power and strive for hegemony is derived from five assumptions about the international system. None of these assumptions alone mandates that states behave competitively. Taken together, however, they depict a world in which states have considerable reason to think and sometimes behave aggressively. In particular, the system encourages states to look for opportunities to maximize their power vis-à-vis other states. . . .

#### Bedrock Assumptions

The first assumption is that the international system is anarchic, which does not mean that it is chaotic or riven by disorder. It is easy to draw that

conclusion, since realism depicts a world characterized by security competition and war. By itself, however, the realist notion of anarchy has nothing to do with conflict; it is an ordering principle, which says that the system comprises independent states that have no central authority above them.<sup>2</sup> Sovereignty, in other words, inheres in states because there is no higher ruling body in the international system.<sup>3</sup> There is no “government over governments.”<sup>4</sup>

The second assumption is that great powers inherently possess some offensive military capability, which gives them the wherewithal to hurt and possibly destroy each other. States are potentially dangerous to each other, although some states have more military might than others and are therefore more dangerous. A state’s military power is usually identified with the particular weaponry at its disposal, although even if there were no weapons, the individuals in those states could still use their feet and hands to attack the population of another state. After all, for every neck, there are two hands to choke it.

The third assumption is that states can never be certain about other states’ intentions. Specifically, no state can be sure that another state will not use its offensive military capability to attack the first state. This is not to say that states necessarily have hostile intentions. Indeed, all of the states in the system may be reliably benign, but it is impossible to be sure of that judgment because intentions are impossible to divine with 100 percent certainty.<sup>5</sup> There are many possible causes of aggression, and no state can be sure that another state is not motivated by

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Source: “Anarchy and the Struggle for Power” from *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* by John Mearsheimer. Copyright 2001 by John J. Mearsheimer. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

one of them.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, intentions can change quickly, so a state's intentions can be benign one day and hostile the next. Uncertainty about intentions is unavoidable, which means that states can never be sure that other states do not have offensive intentions to go along with their offensive capabilities.

The fourth assumption is that survival is the primary goal of great powers. Specifically, states seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order. Survival dominates other motives because, once a state is conquered, it is unlikely to be in a position to pursue other aims. Soviet leader Josef Stalin put the point well during a war scare in 1927: "We can and must build socialism in the [Soviet Union]. But in order to do so we first of all have to exist."<sup>7</sup> States can and do pursue other goals, of course, but security is their most important objective.

The fifth assumption is that great powers are rational actors. They are aware of their external environment and they think strategically about how to survive in it. In particular, they consider the preferences of other states and how their own behavior is likely to affect the behavior of those other states, and how the behavior of those other states is likely to affect their own strategy for survival. Moreover, states pay attention to the long term as well as the immediate consequences of their actions.

As emphasized, none of these assumptions alone dictates that great powers as a general rule *should* behave aggressively toward each other. There is surely the possibility that some state might have hostile intentions, but the only assumption dealing with a specific motive that is common to all states says that their principal objective is to survive, which by itself is a rather harmless goal. Nevertheless, when the five assumptions are married together, they create powerful incentives for great powers to think and act offensively with regard to each other. In particular, three general patterns of behavior result: fear, self-help, and power maximization.

## State Behavior

Great powers fear each other. They regard each other with suspicion, and they worry that

war might be in the offing. They anticipate danger. There is little room for trust among states. For sure, the level of fear varies across time and space, but it cannot be reduced to a trivial level. From the perspective of any one great power, all other great powers are potential enemies. This point is illustrated by the reaction of the United Kingdom and France to German reunification at the end of the Cold War. Despite the fact that these three states had been close allies for almost forty-five years, both the United Kingdom and France immediately began worrying about the potential dangers of a united Germany.<sup>8</sup>

The basis of this fear is that in a world where great powers have the capability to attack each other and might have the motive to do so, any state bent on survival must be at least suspicious of other states and reluctant to trust them. Add to this the "911" problem—the absence of a central authority to which a threatened state can turn for help—and states have even greater incentive to fear each other. Moreover, there is no mechanism, other than the possible self-interest of third parties, for punishing an aggressor. Because it is sometimes difficult to deter potential aggressors, states have ample reason not to trust other states and to be prepared for war with them.

The possible consequences of falling victim to aggression further amplify the importance of fear as a motivating force in world politics. Great powers do not compete with each other as if international politics were merely an economic marketplace. Political competition among states is a much more dangerous business than mere economic intercourse; the former can lead to war, and war often means mass killing on the battlefield as well as mass murder of civilians. In extreme cases, war can even lead to the destruction of states. The horrible consequences of war sometimes cause states to view each other not just as competitors but as potentially deadly enemies. Political antagonism, in short, tends to be intense, because the stakes are great.

States in the international system also aim to guarantee their own survival. Because other states



are potential threats, and because there is no higher authority to come to their rescue when they dial 911, states cannot depend on others for their own security. Each state tends to see itself as vulnerable and alone, and therefore it aims to provide for its own survival. In international politics, God helps those who help themselves. This emphasis on self-help does not preclude states from forming alliances.<sup>9</sup> But alliances are only temporary marriages of convenience: today's alliance partner might be tomorrow's enemy, and today's enemy might be tomorrow's alliance partner. For example, the United States fought with China and the Soviet Union against Germany and Japan in World War II but soon thereafter flip-flopped enemies and partners and allied with West Germany and Japan against China and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

States operating in a self-help world almost always act according to their own self-interest and do not subordinate their interests to the interests of other states, or to the interests of the so-called international community. The reason is simple: it pays to be selfish in a self-help world. This is true in the short term as well as in the long term, because if a state loses in the short run, it might not be around for the long haul.

Apprehensive about the ultimate intentions of other states, and aware that they operate in a self-help system, states quickly understand that the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system. The stronger a state is relative to its potential rivals, the less likely it is that any of those rivals will attack it and threaten its survival. Weaker states will be reluctant to pick fights with more powerful states because the weaker states are likely to suffer military defeat. Indeed, the bigger the gap in power between any two states, the less likely it is that the weaker will attack the stronger. Neither Canada nor Mexico, for example, would countenance attacking the United States, which is far more powerful than its neighbors. The ideal situation is to be the hegemon in the system. As Immanuel Kant said, "It is the desire of every state, or

of its ruler, to arrive at a condition of perpetual peace by conquering the whole world, if that were possible."<sup>10</sup> Survival would then be almost guaranteed.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, states pay close attention to how power is distributed among them, and they make a special effort to maximize their share of world power. Specifically, they look for opportunities to alter the balance of power by acquiring additional increments of power at the expense of potential rivals. States employ a variety of means—economic, diplomatic, and military—to shift the balance of power in their favor, even if doing so makes other states suspicious or even hostile. Because one state's gain in power is another state's loss, great powers tend to have a zero-sum mentality when dealing with each other. The trick, of course, is to be the winner in this competition and to dominate the other states in the system. Thus, the claim that states maximize relative power is tantamount to arguing that states are disposed to think offensively toward other states, even though their ultimate motive is simply to survive. In short, great powers have aggressive intentions.<sup>12</sup>

Even when a great power achieves a distinct military advantage over its rivals, it continues looking for chances to gain more power. The pursuit of power stops only when hegemony is achieved. The idea that a great power might feel secure without dominating the system, provided it has an "appropriate amount" of power, is not persuasive, for two reasons.<sup>13</sup> First, it is difficult to assess how much relative power one state must have over its rivals before it is secure. Is twice as much power an appropriate threshold? Or is three times as much power the magic number? The root of the problem is that power calculations alone do not determine which side wins a war. Clever strategies, for example, sometimes allow less powerful states to defeat more powerful foes.

Second, determining how much power is enough becomes even more complicated when great powers contemplate how power will be distributed among them ten or twenty years down the

road. The capabilities of individual states vary over time, sometimes markedly, and it is often difficult to predict the direction and scope of change in the balance of power. Remember, few in the West anticipated the collapse of the Soviet Union before it happened. In fact, during the first half of the Cold War, many in the West feared that the Soviet economy would eventually generate greater wealth than the American economy, which would cause a marked power shift against the United States and its allies. What the future holds for China and Russia and what the balance of power will look like in 2020 is difficult to foresee.

Given the difficulty of determining how much power is enough for today and tomorrow, great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power. Only a misguided state would pass up an opportunity to be the hegemon in the system because it thought it already had sufficient power to survive.<sup>14</sup> But even if a great power does not have the wherewithal to achieve hegemony (and that is usually the case), it will still act offensively to amass as much power as it can, because states are almost always better off with more rather than less power. In short, states do not become status quo powers until they completely dominate the system.

All states are influenced by this logic, which means that not only do they look for opportunities to take advantage of one another, they also work to ensure that other states do not take advantage of them. After all, rival states are driven by the same logic, and most states are likely to recognize their own motives at play in the actions of other states. In short, states ultimately pay attention to defense as well as offense. They think about conquest themselves, and they work to check aggressor states from gaining power at their expense. This inexorably leads to a world of constant security competition, where states are willing to lie, cheat, and use brute force if it helps them gain advantage over their rivals. Peace, if one defines that concept

as a state of tranquility or mutual concord, is not likely to break out in this world.

The “security dilemma,” which is one of the most well-known concepts in the international relations literature, reflects the basic logic of offensive realism. The essence of the dilemma is that the measures a state takes to increase its own security usually decrease the security of other states. Thus, it is difficult for a state to increase its own chances of survival without threatening the survival of other states. John Herz first introduced the security dilemma in a 1950 article in the journal *World Politics*.<sup>15</sup> After discussing the anarchic nature of international politics, he writes, “Striving to attain security from . . . attack, [states] are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on.”<sup>16</sup> The implication of Herz’s analysis is clear: the best way for a state to survive in anarchy is to take advantage of other states and gain power at their expense. The best defense is a good offense. Since this message is widely understood, ceaseless security competition ensues. Unfortunately, little can be done to ameliorate the security dilemma as long as states operate in anarchy.

It should be apparent from this discussion that saying that states are power maximizers is tantamount to saying that they care about relative power, not absolute power. There is an important distinction here, because states concerned about relative power behave differently than do states interested in absolute power.<sup>17</sup> States that maximize relative power are concerned primarily with the distribution of material capabilities. In particular, they try to gain as large a power advantage as possible over potential rivals, because power is the best means to survival in a dangerous world. Thus, states motivated by relative power concerns are likely to forgo large gains in their own power, if such gains give

rival states even greater power, for smaller national gains that nevertheless provide them with a power advantage over their rivals.<sup>18</sup> States that maximize absolute power, on the other hand, care only about the size of their own gains, not those of other states. They are not motivated by balance-of-power logic but instead are concerned with amassing power without regard to how much power other states control. They would jump at the opportunity for large gains, even if a rival gained more in the deal. Power, according to this logic, is not a means to an end (survival), but an end in itself.<sup>19</sup>

### Calculated Aggression

There is obviously little room for status quo powers in a world where states are inclined to look for opportunities to gain more power. Nevertheless, great powers cannot always act on their offensive intentions, because behavior is influenced not only by what states want but also by their capacity to realize these desires. Every state might want to be king of the hill, but not every state has the wherewithal to compete for that lofty position, much less achieve it. Much depends on how military might is distributed among the great powers. A great power that has a marked power advantage over its rivals is likely to behave more aggressively, because it has the capability as well as the incentive to do so.

By contrast, great powers facing powerful opponents will be less inclined to consider offensive action and more concerned with defending the existing balance of power from threats by their more powerful opponents. Let there be an opportunity for those weaker states to revise the balance in their own favor, however, and they will take advantage of it. Stalin put the point well at the end of World War II: “Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise.”<sup>20</sup> States might also have the capability to gain advantage over a rival power but nevertheless decide that the perceived costs of offense are too high and do not justify the expected benefits.

In short, great powers are not mindless aggressors so bent on gaining power that they charge headlong into losing wars or pursue Pyrrhic victories. On the contrary, before great powers take offensive actions, they think carefully about the balance of power and about how other states will react to their moves. They weigh the costs and risks of offense against the likely benefits. If the benefits do not outweigh the risks, they sit tight and wait for a more propitious moment. Nor do states start arms races that are unlikely to improve their overall position. . . . States sometimes limit defense spending either because spending more would bring no strategic advantage or because spending more would weaken the economy and undermine the state’s power in the long run.<sup>21</sup> To paraphrase Clint Eastwood, a state has to know its limitations to survive in the international system.

Nevertheless, great powers miscalculate from time to time because they invariably make important decisions on the basis of imperfect information. States hardly ever have complete information about any situation they confront. There are two dimensions to this problem. Potential adversaries have incentives to misrepresent their own strength or weakness, and to conceal their true aims.<sup>22</sup> For example, a weaker state trying to deter a stronger state is likely to exaggerate its own power to discourage the potential aggressor from attacking. On the other hand, a state bent on aggression is likely to emphasize its peaceful goals while exaggerating its military weakness, so that the potential victim does not build up its own arms and thus leaves itself vulnerable to attack. Probably no national leader was better at practicing this kind of deception than Adolf Hitler.

But even if disinformation was not a problem, great powers are often unsure about how their own military forces, as well as the adversary’s, will perform on the battlefield. For example, it is sometimes difficult to determine in advance how new weapons and untested combat units will perform in the face of enemy fire. Peacetime maneuvers and war games are helpful but imperfect indicators of

what is likely to happen in actual combat. Fighting wars is a complicated business in which it is often difficult to predict outcomes. Remember that although the United States and its allies scored a stunning and remarkably easy victory against Iraq in early 1991, most experts at the time believed that Iraq's military would be a formidable foe and put up stubborn resistance before finally succumbing to American military might.<sup>23</sup>

Great powers are also sometimes unsure about the resolve of opposing states as well as allies. For example, Germany believed that if it went to war against France and Russia in the summer of 1914, the United Kingdom would probably stay out of the fight. Saddam Hussein expected the United States to stand aside when he invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Both aggressors guessed wrong, but each had good reason to think that its initial judgment was correct. In the 1930s, Adolf Hitler believed that his great-power rivals would be easy to exploit and isolate because each had little interest in fighting Germany and instead was determined to get someone else to assume that burden. He guessed right. In short, great powers constantly find themselves confronting situations in which they have to make important decisions with incomplete information. Not surprisingly, they sometimes make faulty judgments and end up doing themselves serious harm.

Some defensive realists go so far as to suggest that the constraints of the international system are so powerful that offense rarely succeeds, and that aggressive great powers invariably end up being punished.<sup>24</sup> As noted, they emphasize that 1) threatened states balance against aggressors and ultimately crush them, and 2) there is an offense-defense balance that is usually heavily tilted toward the defense, thus making conquest especially difficult. Great powers, therefore, should be content with the existing balance of power and not try to change it by force. After all, it makes little sense for a state to initiate a war that it is likely to lose; that would be self-defeating behavior. It is better to concentrate instead on preserving the balance of power.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, because

aggressors seldom succeed, states should understand that security is abundant, and thus there is no good strategic reason for wanting more power in the first place. In a world where conquest seldom pays, states should have relatively benign intentions toward each other. If they do not, these defensive realists argue, the reason is probably poisonous domestic politics, not smart calculations about how to guarantee one's security in an anarchic world....

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## THE HIERARCHY OF STATE GOALS

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Survival is the number one goal of great powers, according to my theory. In practice, however, states pursue non-security goals as well. For example, great powers invariably seek greater economic prosperity to enhance the welfare of their citizenry. They sometimes seek to promote a particular ideology abroad, as happened during the Cold War when the United States tried to spread democracy around the world and the Soviet Union tried to sell communism. National unification is another goal that sometimes motivates states, as it did with Prussia and Italy in the 19th century and Germany after the Cold War. Great powers also occasionally try to foster human rights around the globe. States might pursue any of these, as well as a number of other non-security goals.

Offensive realism certainly recognizes that great powers might pursue these non-security goals, but it has little to say about them, save for one important point: states can pursue them as long as the requisite behavior does not conflict with balance-of-power logic, which is often the case.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the pursuit of these non-security goals sometimes complements the hunt for relative power. For example, Nazi Germany expanded into Eastern Europe for both ideological and realist reasons, and the superpowers competed with each other during the Cold War for similar reasons. Furthermore, greater economic prosperity invariably means greater wealth, which has significant implications for security, because wealth is the

foundation of military power. Wealthy states can afford powerful military forces, which enhance a state's prospects for survival. As the political economist Jacob Viner noted more than fifty years ago, "there is a long-run harmony" between wealth and power.<sup>27</sup> National unification is another goal that usually complements the pursuit of power. For example, the unified German state that emerged in 1871 was more powerful than the Prussian state it replaced.

Sometimes the pursuit of non-security goals has hardly any effect on the balance of power, one way or the other. Human rights interventions usually fit this description, because they tend to be small-scale operations that cost little and do not detract from a great power's prospects for survival. For better or for worse, states are rarely willing to expend blood and treasure to protect foreign populations from gross abuses, including genocide. For instance, despite claims that American foreign policy is infused with moralism, Somalia (1992–93) is the only instance during the past one hundred years in which U.S. soldiers were killed in action on a humanitarian mission. And in that case, the loss of a mere eighteen soldiers in an infamous fire-fight in October 1993 so traumatized American policymakers that they immediately pulled all U.S. troops out of Somalia and then refused to intervene in Rwanda in the spring of 1994, when ethnic Hutu went on a genocidal rampage against their Tutsi neighbors.<sup>28</sup> Stopping that genocide would have been relatively easy and it would have had virtually no effect on the position of the United States in the balance of power.<sup>29</sup> Yet nothing was done. In short, although realism does not prescribe human rights interventions, it does not necessarily proscribe them.

But sometimes the pursuit of non-security goals conflicts with balance-of-power logic, in which case states usually act according to the dictates of realism. For example, despite the U.S. commitment to spreading democracy across the globe, it helped overthrow democratically elected governments and embraced a number of authoritarian regimes

during the Cold War, when American policymakers felt that these actions would help contain the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup> In World War II, the liberal democracies put aside their antipathy for communism and formed an alliance with the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany. "I can't take communism," Franklin Roosevelt emphasized, but to defeat Hitler "I would hold hands with the Devil."<sup>31</sup> In the same way, Stalin repeatedly demonstrated that when his ideological preferences clashed with power considerations, the latter won out. To take the most blatant example of his realism, the Soviet Union formed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany in August 1939—the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact—in hopes that the agreement would at least temporarily satisfy Hitler's territorial ambitions in Eastern Europe and turn the Wehrmacht toward France and the United Kingdom.<sup>32</sup> When great powers confront a serious threat, in short, they pay little attention to ideology as they search for alliance partners.<sup>33</sup>

Security also trumps wealth when those two goals conflict, because "defence," as Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations*, "is of much more importance than opulence."<sup>34</sup> Smith provides a good illustration of how states behave when forced to choose between wealth and relative power. In 1651, England put into effect the famous Navigation Act, protectionist legislation designed to damage Holland's commerce and ultimately cripple the Dutch economy. The legislation mandated that all goods imported into England be carried either in English ships or ships owned by the country that originally produced the goods. Since the Dutch produced few goods themselves, this measure would badly damage their shipping, the central ingredient in their economic success. Of course, the Navigation Act would hurt England's economy as well, mainly because it would rob England of the benefits of free trade. "The act of navigation," Smith wrote, "is not favorable to foreign commerce, or to the growth of that opulence that can arise from it." Nevertheless, Smith considered the legislation "the wisest of all the commercial regulations of

England” because it did more damage to the Dutch economy than to the English economy, and in the mid-17th century Holland was “the only naval power which could endanger the security of England.”<sup>35</sup>

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## CREATING WORLD ORDER

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The claim is sometimes made that great powers can transcend realist logic by working together to build an international order that fosters peace and justice. World peace, it would appear, can only enhance a state’s prosperity and security. America’s political leaders paid considerable lip service to this line of argument over the course of the 20th century. President Clinton, for example, told an audience at the United Nations in September 1993 that “at the birth of this organization 48 years ago . . . a generation of gifted leaders from many nations stepped forward to organize the world’s efforts on behalf of security and prosperity. . . . Now history has granted to us a moment of even greater opportunity. . . . Let us resolve that we will dream larger. . . . Let us ensure that the world we pass to our children is healthier, safer and more abundant than the one we inhabit today.”<sup>36</sup>

This rhetoric notwithstanding, great powers do not work together to promote world order for its own sake. Instead, each seeks to maximize its own share of world power, which is likely to clash with the goal of creating and sustaining stable international orders.<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that great powers never aim to prevent wars and keep the peace. On the contrary, they work hard to deter wars in which they would be the likely victim. In such cases, however, state behavior is driven largely by narrow calculations about relative power, not by a commitment to build a world order independent of a state’s own interests. The United States, for example, devoted enormous resources to deterring the Soviet Union from starting a war in Europe during the Cold War, not because of some deep-seated commitment to promoting peace around the world but because American leaders feared that a

Soviet victory would lead to a dangerous shift in the balance of power.<sup>38</sup>

The particular international order that obtains at any time is mainly a by-product of the self-interested behavior of the system’s great powers. The configuration of the system, in other words, is the unintended consequence of great-power security competition, not the result of states acting together to organize peace. The establishment of the Cold War order in Europe illustrates this point. Neither the Soviet Union nor the United States intended to establish it, nor did they work together to create it. In fact, each superpower worked hard in the early years of the Cold War to gain power at the expense of the other, while preventing the other from doing likewise.<sup>39</sup> The system that emerged in Europe in the aftermath of World War II was the unplanned consequence of intense security competition between the superpowers. . . .

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## COOPERATION AMONG STATES

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One might conclude from the preceding discussion that my theory does not allow for any cooperation among the great powers. But this conclusion would be wrong. States can cooperate, although cooperation is sometimes difficult to achieve and always difficult to sustain. Two factors inhibit cooperation: considerations about relative gains and concern about cheating.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, great powers live in a fundamentally competitive world where they view each other as real, or at least potential, enemies, and they therefore look to gain power at each other’s expense.

Any two states contemplating cooperation must consider how profits or gains will be distributed between them. They can think about the division in terms of either absolute or relative gains (recall the distinction made earlier between pursuing either absolute power or relative power; the concept here is the same). With absolute gains, each side is concerned with maximizing its own profits and cares little about how much the other side gains or loses in the deal. Each side cares about the other only to the extent that the other side’s behavior

affects its own prospects for achieving maximum profits. With relative gains, on the other hand, each side considers not only its own individual gain but also how well it fares compared to the other side.

Because great powers care deeply about the balance of power, their thinking focuses on relative gains when they consider cooperating with other states. For sure, each state tries to maximize its absolute gains; still, it is more important for a state to make sure that it does no worse, and perhaps better, than the other state in any agreement. Cooperation is more difficult to achieve, however, when states are attuned to relative gains rather than absolute gains.<sup>41</sup> This is because states concerned about absolute gains have to make sure that if the pie is expanding, they are getting at least some portion of the increase, whereas states that worry about relative gains must pay careful attention to how the pie is divided, which complicates cooperative efforts.

Concerns about cheating also hinder cooperation. Great powers are often reluctant to enter into cooperative agreements for fear that the other side will cheat on the agreement and gain a significant advantage. This concern is especially acute in the military realm, causing a “special peril of defection,” because the nature of military weaponry allows for rapid shifts in the balance of power.<sup>42</sup> Such a development could create a window of opportunity for the state that cheats to inflict a decisive defeat on its victim.

These barriers to cooperation notwithstanding, great powers do cooperate in a realist world. Balance-of-power logic often causes great powers to form alliances and cooperate against common enemies. The United Kingdom, France, and Russia, for example, were allies against Germany before and during World War I. States sometimes cooperate to gang up on a third state, as Germany and the Soviet Union did against Poland in 1939.<sup>43</sup> More recently, Serbia and Croatia agreed to conquer and divide Bosnia between them, although the United States and its European allies prevented them from executing their agreement.<sup>44</sup> Rivals as well as allies cooperate. After all, deals can be struck that roughly reflect the distribution of power and satisfy

concerns about cheating. The various arms control agreements signed by the superpowers during the Cold War illustrate this point.

The bottom line, however, is that cooperation takes place in a world that is competitive at its core—one where states have powerful incentives to take advantage of other states. This point is graphically highlighted by the state of European politics in the forty years before World War I. The great powers cooperated frequently during this period, but that did not stop them from going to war on August 1, 1914.<sup>45</sup> The United States and the Soviet Union also cooperated considerably during World War II, but that cooperation did not prevent the outbreak of the Cold War shortly after Germany and Japan were defeated. Perhaps most amazingly, there was significant economic and military cooperation between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during the two years before the Wehrmacht attacked the Red Army.<sup>46</sup> No amount of cooperation can eliminate the dominating logic of security competition. Genuine peace, or a world in which states do not compete for power, is not likely as long as the state system remains anarchic.

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## CONCLUSION

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In sum, my argument is that the structure of the international system, not the particular characteristics of individual great powers, causes them to think and act offensively and to seek hegemony.<sup>47</sup> I do not adopt Morgenthau’s claim that states invariably behave aggressively because they have a will to power hardwired into them. Instead, I assume that the principal motive behind great-power behavior is survival. In anarchy, however, the desire to survive encourages states to behave aggressively. Nor does my theory classify states as more or less aggressive on the basis of their economic or political systems. Offensive realism makes only a handful of assumptions about great powers, and these assumptions apply equally to all great powers. Except for differences in how much power each state controls, the theory treats all states alike.

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## NOTES

1. Most realist scholars allow in their theories for status quo powers that are not hegemons. At least some states, they argue, are likely to be satisfied with the balance of power and thus have no incentive to change it. See Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?" *Security Studies* 5, No. 3 (Spring 1996, special issue on "Realism: Restatements and Renewal," ed. Benjamin Frankel), pp. 98–101; and Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), pp. 84–86, 91–92, 125–26.
2. The concept of anarchy and its consequences for international politics was first articulated by G. Lowes Dickinson, *The European Anarchy* (New York: Macmillan, 1916). For a more recent and more elaborate discussion of anarchy, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 88–93. Also see Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis, eds., *International Politics: Anarchy, Force, Imperialism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), pt. 1; and Helen Milner, "The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique," *Review of International Studies* 17, No. 1 (January 1991), pp. 67–85.
3. Although the focus in this study is on the state system, realist logic can be applied to other kinds of anarchic systems. After all, it is the absence of central authority, not any special characteristic of states, that causes them to compete for power. Markus Fischer, for example, applies the theory to Europe in the Middle Ages, before the state system emerged in 1648. See Fischer, "Feudal Europe, 800–1300: Communal Discourse and Conflictual Practices," *International Organization* 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 427–66. The theory can also be used to explain the behavior of individuals. The most important work in this regard is Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1986). Also see Elijah Anderson, "The Code of the Streets," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1994, pp. 80–94; Barry R. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival* 35, No. 1 (Spring 1993), pp. 27–47; and Robert J. Spitzer, *The Politics of Gun Control* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1995), chap. 6.
4. Inis L. Claude, Jr., *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization*. 4th ed. (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 14.
5. The claim that states might have benign intentions is simply a starting assumption. I argue subsequently that when you combine the theory's five assumptions, states are put in a position in which they are strongly disposed to having hostile intentions toward each other.
6. My theory ultimately argues that great powers behave offensively toward each other because that is the best way for them to guarantee their security in an anarchic world. The assumption here, however, is that there are many reasons besides security for why a state might behave aggressively toward another state. In fact, it is uncertainty about whether those non-security causes of war are at play or might come into play, that pushes great powers to worry about their survival and thus act offensively. Security concerns alone cannot cause great powers to act aggressively. The possibility that at least one state might be motivated by non-security calculations is a necessary condition



for offensive realism, as well as for any other structural theory of international politics that predicts security competition. Schweller puts the point well: “If states are assumed to seek nothing more than their own survival, why would they feel threatened? Why would they engage in balancing behavior? In a hypothetical world that has never experienced crime, the concept of security is meaningless.” Schweller, “Neorealism’s Status-Quo Bias,” p. 91. Herbert Butterfield makes essentially the same point when he writes, “Wars would hardly be likely to occur if all men were Christian saints, competing with one another in nothing, perhaps, save self-renunciation.” C. T. McIntire, ed., *Herbert Butterfield: Writings on Christianity and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 73. Also see Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chap. 2.

7. Quoted in Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 271.
8. See Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany’s Road to Unification* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1993), chap. 12; Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), chaps. 25–26; and Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), chap. 4.
9. Frederick Schuman introduced the concept of self-help in *International Politics: An Introduction to the Western State System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933), pp. 199–202, 514, although Waltz made the concept famous in *Theory of International Politics*, chap. 6. On realism and alliances, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).
10. Quoted in Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1946), p. 40.
11. If one state achieves hegemony, the system ceases to be anarchic and becomes hierarchic. Offensive realism, which assumes international anarchy, has little to say about politics under hierarchy. But as discussed later, it is highly unlikely that any state will become a global hegemon, although regional hegemony is feasible. Thus, realism is likely to provide important insights about world politics for the foreseeable future, save for what goes on inside in a region that is dominated by a hegemon.
12. Although great powers always have aggressive intentions, they are not always *aggressors*, mainly because sometimes they do not have the capability to behave aggressively. I use the term “aggressor” throughout this book to denote great powers that have the material wherewithal to act on their aggressive intentions.
13. Kenneth Waltz maintains that great powers should not pursue hegemony but instead should aim to control an “appropriate” amount of world power. See Waltz, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory,” in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, eds., *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 40.
14. The following hypothetical example illustrates this point. Assume that American policymakers were forced to choose between two different power balances in the Western Hemisphere. The first is the present distribution of power, whereby the United States is a hegemon that no state in the region would

- dare challenge militarily. In the second scenario, China replaces Canada and Germany takes the place of Mexico. Even though the United States would have a significant military advantage over both China and Germany, it is difficult to imagine any American strategist opting for this scenario over U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere.
15. John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 2, No. 2 (January 1950), pp. 157–80. Although Dickinson did not use the term "security dilemma," its logic is clearly articulated in *European Anarchy*, pp. 20, 88.
  16. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism," p. 157.
  17. See Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," *International Organization* 42, No. 3 (Summer 1988), pp. 485–507; Stephen D. Krasner, "Global Communications and National Power: Life on the Pareto Frontier," *World Politics* 43, No. 3 (April 1991), pp. 336–66; and Robert Powell, "Absolute and Relative Gains in International Relations Theory," *American Political Science Review* 85, No. 4 (December 1991), pp. 1303–20.
  18. See Michael Mastanduno, "Do Relative Gains Matter? America's Response to Japanese Industrial Policy," *International Security* 16, No. 1 (Summer 1991), pp. 73–113.
  19. Waltz maintains that in Hans Morgenthau's theory, states seek power as an end in itself; thus, they are concerned with absolute power, not relative power. See Waltz, "Origins of War," pp. 40–41; and Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 126–27. Although Morgenthau occasionally makes statements that appear to support Waltz's charge, there is abundant evidence in Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1973) that states are concerned mainly with the pursuit of relative power.
  20. Quoted in Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 36.
  21. In short, the key issue for evaluating offensive realism is not whether a state is constantly trying to conquer other countries or going all out in terms of defense spending but whether or not great powers routinely pass up promising opportunities to gain power over rivals.
  22. See Richard K. Betts, *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1982); James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995), pp. 390–401; Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); and Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 45–51, 83, 137–42.
  23. See Joel Achenbach, "The Experts in Retreat: After-the-Fact Explanations for the Gloomy Predictions," *Washington Post*, February 28, 1991; and Jacob Weisberg, "Gulfballs: How the Experts Blew It, Big-Time," *New Republic*, March 25, 1991.
  24. Jack Snyder and Stephen Van Evera make this argument in its boldest form. See Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 1, 307–8; and Van Evera, *Causes of War*, esp. pp. 6, 9.

25. Relatedly, some defensive realists interpret the security dilemma to say that the offensive measures a state takes to enhance its own security force rival states to respond in kind, leaving all states no better off than if they had done nothing, and possibly even worse off. See Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics* 50, No. 1 (October 1997), pp. 171–201. Given this understanding of the security dilemma, hardly any security competition should ensue among rational states, because it would be fruitless, maybe even counterproductive, to try to gain advantage over rival powers. Indeed, it is difficult to see why states operating in a world where aggressive behavior equals self-defeating behavior would face a "security dilemma." It would seem to make good sense for all states to forsake war and live in peace. Of course, Herz did not describe the security dilemma this way when he introduced it in 1950. As noted, his original rendition of the concept is a synoptic statement of offensive realism.
26. See note 6 in this chapter.
27. Jacob Viner, "Power versus Plenty as Objectives of Foreign Policy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *World Politics* 1, No. 1 (October 1948), p. 10.
28. See Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Dawn: A Story of Modern War* (London: Penguin, 1999); Alison Des Forges, "*Leave None to Tell the Story*": *Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), pp. 623–25; and Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 274–75.
29. See Scott R. Feil, *Preventing Genocide: How the Early Use of Force Might Have Succeeded in Rwanda* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1998); and John Mueller, "The Banality of 'Ethnic War,'" *International Security* 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 58–62. For a less sanguine view of how many lives would have been saved had the United States intervened in Rwanda, see Alan J. Kuperman, "Rwanda in Retrospect," *Foreign Affairs* 79, No. 1 (January–February 2000), pp. 94–118.
30. See David F. Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), chaps. 4–6; Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945–1993* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Stephen Van Evera, "Why Europe Matters, Why the Third World Doesn't: American Grand Strategy after the Cold War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 13, No. 2 (June 1990), pp. 25–30.
31. Quoted in John M. Carroll and George C. Herring, eds., *Modern American Diplomacy*, rev. ed. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1996), p. 122.
32. Nikita Khrushchev makes a similar point about Stalin's policy toward Chinese nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek during World War II: "Despite his conflict with the Chinese Communist Party, Chiang Kai-shek was fighting against Japanese imperialism. Therefore, Stalin—and consequently the Soviet government—considered Chiang a progressive force. Japan was our number one enemy in the East, so it was in the interests of the Soviet Union to support Chiang. Of course, we supported him only insofar as we didn't want

- to see him defeated by the Japanese—in much the same way that Churchill, who had been our enemy since the first days of the Soviet Union, was sensible enough to support us in the war against Hitler.” *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, trans. and ed. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), pp. 237–38.
33. See Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, pp. 5, 266–68.
  34. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), Vol. 1, p. 487. All the quotes in this paragraph are from pp. 484–87 of that book.
  35. For an overview of the Anglo-Dutch rivalry, see Jack S. Levy, “The Rise and Decline of the Anglo-Dutch Rivalry, 1609–1689,” in William R. Thompson, ed., *Great Power Rivalries* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 172–200; and Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), chap. 2. This example has direct bearing on the earlier discussion of relative versus absolute power. Specifically, without the Navigation Act, both England and Holland probably would have made greater absolute gains, because their economies would have benefited from open trade. England, however, probably would not have gained much of a relative advantage over Holland. With the Navigation Act, England gained a significant relative advantage over Holland, but both sides suffered in terms of absolute gains. The bottom line is that relative power considerations drive great-power behavior.
  36. William J. Clinton, “Address by the President to the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” United Nations, New York, September 27, 1993. Also see George Bush, “Toward a New World Order: Address by the President to a Joint Session of Congress,” September 11, 1990.
  37. Bradley Thayer examined whether the victorious powers were able to create and maintain stable security orders in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, World War I, and World War II, or whether they competed among themselves for power, as realism would predict. In particular, he looked at the workings of the Concert of Europe, the League of Nations, and the United Nations, which were purportedly designed to limit, if not eliminate, realist behavior by the great powers. Thayer concludes that the rhetoric of the triumphant powers notwithstanding, they remained firmly committed to gaining power at each other’s expense. See Bradley A. Thayer, “Creating Stability in New World Orders,” Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, August 1996. Also see Korina Kagan, “The Myth of the European Concert,” *Security Studies* 7, No. 2 (Winter 1997–98), pp. 1–57. She concludes that the Concert of Europe “was a weak and ineffective institution that was largely irrelevant to great power behavior” (p. 3).
  38. See Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).
  39. For a discussion of American efforts to undermine Soviet control of Eastern Europe, see Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America’s Secret War behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000); Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1997); and Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America’s Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc*,

- 1947–1956 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).
40. See Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation,” pp. 498, 500.
  41. For evidence of relative gains considerations thwarting cooperation among states, see Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), chap. 3.
  42. Charles Lipson, “International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs,” *World Politics* 37, No. 1 (October 1984), p. 14.
  43. See Randall L. Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security* 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 72–107. See also the works cited in note 59 in this chapter.
  44. See Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War*, 3d rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1996), p. 149; Philip Sherwell and Alina Petric, “Tudjman Tapes Reveal Plans to Divide Bosnia and Hide War Crimes,” *Sunday Telegraph* (London), June 18, 2000; Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), pp. 131–32, 213; and Warren Zimmerman, *Origins of a Catastrophe: Yugoslavia and Its Destroyers—America’s Last Ambassador Tells What Happened and Why* (New York: Times Books, 1996), pp. 116–17.
  45. See John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Penguin, 1988), chap. 2; and J. M. Roberts, *Europe, 1880–1945* (London: Longman, 1970), pp. 239–41.
  46. For information on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 and the ensuing cooperation between those states, see Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), chaps. 14–15; I.C.B. Dear, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 780–82; Anthony Read and David Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace: Hitler, Stalin, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939–1941* (New York: Norton, 1988); Geoffrey Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance: Stalin’s Pact with Hitler* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), chaps. 8–10; and Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1973*, 2d ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974), chap. 6.
  47. Waltz maintains that structural theories can explain international outcomes—i.e., whether war is more likely in bipolar or multipolar systems—but that they cannot explain the foreign policy behavior of particular states. A separate theory of foreign policy, he argues, is needed for that task. See *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 71–72, 121–23. Colin Elman challenges Waltz on this point, arguing that there is no logical reason why systemic theories cannot be used as a theory of foreign policy. The key issue, as Elman notes, is whether the particular structural theory helps us understand the foreign policy decisions that states make. I will attempt to show that offensive realism can be used to explain both the foreign policy of individual states and international outcomes. See Colin Elman, “Horses for Courses: Why Not Neorealist Theories of Foreign Policy?”; Kenneth N. Waltz, “International Politics Is Not Foreign Policy”; and Colin Elman, “Cause, Effect, and Consistency: A Response to Kenneth Waltz,” in *Security Studies* 6, No. 1 (Autumn 1996), pp. 7–61.

## Reading 2.4

# Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power

Stephen M. Walt

The question “what causes alignment?” is a central issue in debates on American foreign policy, and the choices that are made often turn on which hypotheses of alliance formation are endorsed. In general, those who believe that American security is fragile most often assume that Soviet allies are reliable and America’s are prone to defect, while those who believe it is robust tend to view American allies as stronger and more reliable than those of the U.S.S.R. These divergent beliefs clash over a variety of specific issues. For example, should the U.S. increase its commitment to NATO to prevent the growth of Soviet military power from leading to the “Finlandization” of Europe? Alternatively, should the U.S. do less in the expectation that its allies will do more? Should the U.S. oppose leftist regimes in the developing world because their domestic ideology will lead them to ally with the Soviet Union, or can a policy of accommodating radical nationalist regimes lead to good relations with them? Can Soviet or American military aid create reliable proxies in the Third World? Is it worth the effort and expense? Each of these questions carries important implications for American national security policy, and the answers

ultimately turn upon which hypotheses of alliance formation are believed to be most valid.

Despite the obvious importance of understanding how states select their partners, most scholarly research on alliances has ignored or obscured these questions.<sup>1</sup> This article is intended to correct these omissions by outlining some of the most important hypotheses of alliance formation and by exploring the policy implications of each. The first section explores the competing propositions that states either balance against strong or threatening states or, alternatively, that they “bandwagon” with them. I shall also consider the sharply different foreign and defense policies that each proposition implies. . . .

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### BALANCING VERSUS BANDWAGONING: ALLIANCES AS A RESPONSE TO THREAT

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Alliances are most commonly viewed as a response to threats, yet there is sharp disagreement as to what that response will be. When entering an alliance, states may either *balance* (ally in opposition to the principal source of danger) or *bandwagon* (ally with the state that poses the major threat).<sup>2</sup>

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Source: Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9: no. 4 (Spring 1985): 3–18 © 1985 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Reprinted with permission.

These contrasting hypotheses depict very different worlds, and the policies that follow from each are equally distinct. In the simplest terms, if balancing is more common than bandwagoning, then states are more secure because aggressors will face combined opposition. Status quo states should therefore avoid provoking countervailing coalitions by eschewing threatening foreign and defense policies. But if bandwagoning is the dominant tendency, then security is scarce because aggression is rewarded. A more belligerent foreign policy and a more capable military establishment are the logical policy choices.

Although both of these hypotheses have been examined by scholars and embraced by statesmen, important details have been neglected. Accordingly, I shall first present each hypothesis in its simplest (and most common) form and then indicate how they should be revised. That task accomplished, I shall then consider which hypothesis describes the dominant tendency in international politics.

### Balancing Behavior

The proposition that states will join alliances in order to avoid domination by stronger powers lies at the heart of traditional balance of power theory.<sup>3</sup> According to this hypothesis, states join alliances to protect themselves from states or coalitions whose superior resources could pose a threat. States will choose to balance for two main reasons.

First, states risk their own survival if they fail to curb a potential hegemon before it becomes too strong. To ally *with* the dominant power means placing one's trust in its continued benevolence. The safer strategy is to join with those who cannot readily dominate their allies, in order to avoid being dominated by those who can.<sup>4</sup> As Winston Churchill explained Britain's traditional alliance policy:

For four hundred years the foreign policy of England has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most dominating power on the Continent. . . . it would have been easy . . . and tempting to join with the stronger and share the fruits of

his conquest. However, we always took the harder course, joined with the less strong Powers, . . . and thus defeated the Continental military tyrant whoever he was. . . .<sup>5</sup>

In the same way, Henry Kissinger advocated *rapprochement* with China rather than the Soviet Union because he believed that, in a triangular relationship, it was better to align with the weaker side.<sup>6</sup>

Second, joining the more vulnerable side increases the new member's influence, because the weaker side has greater need for assistance. Joining the stronger side, by contrast, reduces the new member's influence (because it adds relatively less to the coalition) *and* leaves it vulnerable to the whims of its new partners. Alignment with the weaker side is thus the preferred choice.<sup>7</sup>

The appeal of balance of power theory as an explanation for alliance formation is unsurprising, given the numerous examples of states joining together to resist a threatening state or coalition.<sup>8</sup> Yet despite the powerful evidence that history provides in support of this hypothesis, it is often suggested that the opposite response is more likely, that states will prefer to ally with the strongest power. Who argues that bandwagoning is the dominant tendency in international politics, and why do they think so?

### Bandwagoning Behavior

The belief that states will tend to ally *with* rather than against the dominant side is surprisingly common. According to one scholar,

[In international politics] momentum accrues to the gainer and accelerates his movement. The appearance of irreversibility in his gains enfeebles one side and stimulates the other all the more. The bandwagon collects those on the sidelines.<sup>9</sup>

Scholars are not alone in this conception. For example, the German Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz's famous "risk theory" implied such a view.

By building a great battle fleet, Tirpitz argued, Germany could force England into neutrality or alliance with it by posing a threat to England's vital maritime supremacy.<sup>10</sup> More recently, American officials have repeatedly embraced the bandwagoning hypothesis in justifying American foreign policy commitments. John F. Kennedy claimed that, "if the United States were to falter, the whole world . . . would inevitably begin to move toward the Communist bloc."<sup>11</sup> Although the *rapprochement* with China showed his own willingness to balance, Henry Kissinger also revealed his belief that most states tend to bandwagon by suggesting that "if leaders around the world . . . assume that the U.S. lacked either the forces or the will . . . they will accommodate themselves to the dominant trend."<sup>12</sup> And Ronald Reagan has endorsed the same beliefs in his claim that "if we cannot defend ourselves [in Central America] . . . then we cannot expect to prevail elsewhere . . . our credibility will collapse and our alliances will crumble."<sup>13</sup>

Statements like these reveal a common theme: states are attracted to strength. The more powerful you are and the more clearly this is demonstrated, the more likely others are to ally with you. By contrast, a decline in relative position will lead one's allies to opt for neutrality at best or to defect to the other side at worst.

What is the logic behind the bandwagoning hypothesis? Two distinct motives can be identified. First, bandwagoning may be adopted as a form of appeasement. By aligning with the threatening state or coalition, the bandwagoner may hope to avoid an attack on himself by diverting it elsewhere. Second, a state may align with the dominant side in war in order to share the spoils of victory. Mussolini's declaration of war on France and Russia's entry into the war against Japan in 1945 illustrate this type of bandwagoning, as do Italian and Rumanian alliance choices in World War I.<sup>14</sup> By joining what they believed was the stronger side, each hoped to make territorial gains at the end of the fighting.

Stalin's decision to ally with Hitler in 1939 illustrates *both* motives nicely. The Nazi-Soviet Pact led to the dismemberment of Poland and may

have deflected Hitler's ambitions westward. Stalin was thus able to gain both time and territory by bandwagoning with Hitler.<sup>15</sup> In general, however, these two motives for bandwagoning are quite different. In the first, bandwagoning is chosen for *defensive* reasons, as a means of maintaining independence in the face of a potential threat. In the second, a bandwagoning state chooses the leading side for *offensive* reasons, in order to acquire territory. Regardless of the specific motive, however, bandwagoning behavior stands in sharp contrast to the predictions of balance of power theory. The two hypotheses thus offer mutually exclusive explanations for how states will make their alliance choices.

### Different Sources of Threat

Balancing and bandwagoning are usually framed solely in terms of power. Balancing is alignment with the weaker side; bandwagoning means to choose the stronger.<sup>16</sup> This view is seriously flawed, however, because it ignores the other factors that statesmen will consider when identifying potential threats and prospective allies. Although power is an important factor in their calculations, it is not the only one. Rather than allying in response to power alone, it is more accurate to say that states will ally with or against the most *threatening* power. For example, states may *balance* by allying with other strong states, if a weaker power is more dangerous for other reasons. Thus the coalitions that defeated Germany in World Wars I and II were vastly superior in total resources but united by their common recognition that German expansionism posed the greater danger.<sup>17</sup> Because balancing and bandwagoning are more accurately viewed as a response to threats, it is important to consider all the factors that will affect the level of threat that states may pose. I shall therefore discuss the impact of: 1) aggregate power; 2) proximity; 3) offensive capability; and 4) offensive intentions.

**Aggregate Power.** The greater a state's total resources (i.e., population, industrial and military capability, technological prowess, etc.), the greater



a potential threat it can pose to others. Recognizing this, Walter Lippmann and George Kennan defined the aim of American grand strategy to be preventing any single state from controlling the combined resources of industrial Eurasia, and they advocated U.S. intervention on whichever side was weaker when this prospect emerged.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Lord Grey, British Foreign Secretary in 1914, justified British intervention against the Dual Alliance by saying:

To stand aside would mean the domination of Germany; the subordination of France and Russia; the isolation of Britain, . . . and ultimately Germany would wield the whole power of the continent.<sup>19</sup>

In the same way, Castlereagh's aim to create a "just distribution of the forces in Europe" reveals his own concern for the distribution of aggregate power, as does Bismarck's dictum that "in a system of five great powers, the goal must always be to be in a group of three or more."<sup>20</sup> The overall power that states can wield is thus an important component of the threat they can pose to others.

If power can be threatening, however, it can also be prized. States with great power have the capacity either to punish enemies or reward friends. By itself, therefore, another state's aggregate power may be a motive for either balancing or bandwagoning.

**Proximate Power.** States will also align in response to threats from proximate power. Because the ability to project power declines with distance, states that are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away.<sup>21</sup> For example, the British Foreign Office explained why Britain was especially sensitive to German naval expansion by saying:

If the British press pays more attention to the increase of Germany's naval power than to a similar movement in Brazil . . . this is no doubt due to the proximity of the German coasts and the remoteness of Brazil.<sup>22</sup>

As with aggregate power, proximate threats can produce either a balancing or a bandwagoning response. When proximate threats trigger a balancing response, alliance networks that resemble checkerboards are the likely result. Students of diplomatic history have long been told that "neighbors of neighbors are friends," and the tendency for encircling states to align against a central power has been known since Kautilya's writings in the 4th century.<sup>23</sup> Examples include: France and Russia against Wilhelmine Germany; France and the "Little Entente" in the 1930s; the Soviet Union and Vietnam against China and Cambodia in the 1970s; the U.S.S.R. and India against the U.S. and Pakistan presently; and the tacit alignment between Iran and Syria against Iraq and its various Arab supporters. When a threat from proximate power leads to bandwagoning, by contrast, the familiar phenomenon of a "sphere of influence" is created. Small states bordering a great power may be so vulnerable that they choose to bandwagon rather than balance, especially if their powerful neighbor has demonstrated its ability to compel obedience. Thus Finland, whose name has become synonymous with bandwagoning, chose to do so only after losing two major wars against the Soviet Union within a five-year period.

**Offensive Power.** All else being equal, states with large offensive capabilities are more likely to provoke an alliance than those who are either militarily weak or capable only of defending.<sup>24</sup> Once again, the effects of this factor vary. On the one hand, the immediate threat that such capabilities pose may lead states to balance by allying with others.<sup>25</sup> Tirpitz's "risk strategy" backfired for precisely this reason. England viewed the German battle fleet as a potent offensive threat, and redoubled its own naval efforts while reinforcing its ties with France and Russia.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, when offensive power permits rapid conquest, vulnerable states may see little hope in resisting. Balancing may seem unwise because one's allies may not be able to provide assistance quickly enough. This is another reason why "spheres of influence" may form: states bordering those with large offensive

capabilities (and who are far from potential allies) may be forced to bandwagon because balancing alliances are simply not viable.<sup>27</sup>

**Offensive Intentions.** Finally, states that appear aggressive are likely to provoke others to balance against them. As I noted earlier, Nazi Germany provoked an overwhelming coalition against itself because it combined substantial power with extremely offensive ambitions. Indeed, even states with rather modest capabilities may trigger a balancing response if they are perceived as especially aggressive. Thus Libya under Colonel Qaddafi has prompted Egypt, Israel, France, the U.S., Chad, and the Sudan to coordinate political and military responses in order to defend against Libyan activities.<sup>28</sup>

Perceptions of intent play an especially crucial role in alliance choices. In addition to the factors already mentioned, for example, changing perceptions of German aims helped create the Triple Entente. Whereas Bismarck had followed a careful policy of defending the status quo after 1870, the expansionist ambitions of his successors provoked steadily increasing alarm among the other European powers.<sup>29</sup> Although the growth of German power played a major role, the importance of German intentions should not be ignored. This is nicely revealed by Eyre Crowe's famous 1907 memorandum defining British policy towards Germany. The analysis is all the more striking because Crowe obviously has few objections to the growth of German power per se:

It cannot for a moment be questioned that the mere existence and healthy activity of a powerful Germany is an undoubted blessing for all. . . . *So long, then, as Germany competes for an intellectual and moral leadership of the world in reliance on its own natural advantages and energies* England cannot but admire. . . . [So] *long as Germany's action does not overstep the line of legitimate protection of existing rights it can always count upon the sympathy and good will*, and even the moral support of England. . . . It would be of real advantage if the determination not to bar Germany's *legitimate and peaceful expansion*

were made as patent and pronounced as authoritatively as possible, provided that care was taken at the same time to make it quite clear that *this benevolent attitude will give way to determined opposition at the first sign of British or allied interests being adversely affected*.<sup>30</sup>

In short, Britain will oppose Germany only if Germany seeks to expand through conquest. Intentions, not power, are crucial.

When a state is believed to be unalterably aggressive, others are unlikely to bandwagon. After all, if an aggressor's intentions are impossible to change, then balancing with others is the best way to avoid becoming a victim. Thus Prime Minister de Broqueville of Belgium rejected the German ultimatum of August 2, 1914 by saying:

If die we must, better death with honor. We have no other choice. Our submission would serve no end . . . if Germany is victorious, Belgium, *whatever her attitude*, will be annexed to the Reich.<sup>31</sup>

In short, the more aggressive or expansionist a state appears, the more likely it is to trigger an opposing coalition.

By refining the basic hypotheses to consider several sources of threat, we gain a more complete picture of the factors that statesmen will consider when making alliance choices. However, one cannot say a priori which sources of threat will be most important in any given case, only that all of them are likely to play a role. The next step is to consider which—balancing or bandwagoning—is the dominant tendency in international affairs.

## The Implications of Balancing and Bandwagoning

The two hypotheses I have just elaborated paint starkly contrasting pictures of international politics. Resolving the question of which picture is more accurate is especially important because the two hypotheses imply very different

policy prescriptions. What are the worlds that each depicts, and what policies are implied?

If balancing is the dominant tendency, then threatening states will provoke others to align against them. Because those who seek to dominate others will attract widespread opposition, status quo states can take a relatively sanguine view of threats. Credibility is less important in a balancing world because one's allies will resist threatening states out of their own self-interest, not because they expect others to do it for them. Thus the fear that allies will defect declines. Moreover, if balancing is the norm *and* if statesmen understand this tendency, aggression is discouraged because those who contemplate it will anticipate resistance.

In a balancing world, policies that demonstrate restraint and benevolence are best. Strong states may be valued as allies because they have much to offer their partners, but they must take particular care to avoid appearing aggressive. Foreign and defense policies that minimize the threat one poses to others make the most sense in such a world.

By contrast, a bandwagoning world is much more competitive. If states tend to ally with the strongest and most threatening state, then great powers will be rewarded if they appear both strong and potentially dangerous. International rivalries will be more intense, because a single defeat may signal the decline of one side and the ascendancy of the other. This is especially alarming in a bandwagoning world, because additional defections and a further decline in the loser's position are to be expected. Moreover, if statesmen believe that bandwagoning is widespread, they will be more inclined to use force to resolve international disputes. This is because they will both fear the gains that others may make by demonstrating *their* power or resolve, and because they will assume that others will be unlikely to balance against them.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, misperceiving the relative propensity to balance or bandwagon is dangerous, because the policies that are appropriate for one situation will backfire *completely* in the other. If statesmen follow the balancing prescription in a bandwagoning world, their moderate responses and

relaxed view of threats will encourage their allies to defect, leaving them isolated against an overwhelming coalition. Conversely, following the bandwagoning prescription (employing power and threats frequently) in a world of balancers will merely lead others to oppose you more and more vigorously.<sup>33</sup>

These concerns are not just theoretical. In the 1930s, France failed to recognize that its allies in the "Little Entente" were prone to bandwagon, a tendency that French military and diplomatic policies reinforced. By contrast, Soviet attempts to intimidate Turkey after World War II backfired by provoking a greater U.S. commitment in the area and by cementing Turkey's interest in a formal alliance with the West.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, the self-encircling bellicosity of Wilhelmine Germany and Imperial Japan reflected the assumption, prevalent in both states, that bandwagoning was the dominant tendency in international affairs.

### Why Balancing Is More Common Than Bandwagoning

Which of these two worlds most resembles reality? Which hypothesis describes the dominant tendency in international politics? Although statesmen frequently justify their actions by invoking the bandwagoning hypothesis, history provides little evidence for this assertion. On the contrary, balance of power theorists from Ranke forward have persistently and persuasively shown that states facing an external threat overwhelmingly prefer to balance against the threat rather than bandwagon with it. This is primarily because an alignment that preserves most of a state's freedom of action is preferable to accepting subordination under a potential hegemon. Because intentions can change and perceptions are unreliable, it is safer to balance against potential threats than to hope that strong states will remain benevolent.

The overwhelming tendency for states to balance rather than bandwagon defeated the hegemonic aspirations of Spain under Philip II, France under Louis XIV and Napoleon, and Germany under Wilhelm II and Hitler. Where

the bandwagoning hypothesis predicts that these potential hegemony should have attracted more and more support as they expanded, the actual response of the powers that they threatened was precisely the opposite. The more clearly any one state sought to dominate the rest, the more reliably the others combined to counter the threat.<sup>35</sup>

Nor is this tendency confined to Europe, as a few examples will illustrate. The American defeat in Indochina, rather than inviting bandwagoning throughout Southeast Asia, brought renewed cooperation among the ASEAN states and permitted the traditional animosity between China and Vietnam to burst forth anew. In the 1950s, the long-standing rivalry between the House of Saud in Saudi Arabia and the Hashemite dynasties in Iraq and Jordan gave way to the “King’s Alliance” when Nasser’s Egypt emerged as the dominant power in the region. The desire to balance against regional threats has also inspired most Middle Eastern states to align with one or the other superpower, just as the superpower rivalry itself made the Soviet Union and the United States willing to support these regional clients.<sup>36</sup> In the same way, the threat from revolutionary Iran has provoked the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council, led by Saudi Arabia. Whatever one may think of the *efficacy* of these various arrangements, the *tendency* that they illustrate is striking.<sup>37</sup> Even in widely different contexts, the strong tendency for states to balance when making alliance choices is confirmed.

Scholars or statesmen who argue the opposite view—whether in the guise of “Finlandization,” the “domino theory,” or other variations on bandwagoning logic—are placing themselves in direct opposition to the most widely accepted theory in the field of international relations. Just as clearly, their predictions about expected state behavior are contrary to most of international history. The effects of this disregard for evidence are severe: 1) such views exaggerate American insecurity by portraying U.S. allies as excessively prone to defect; 2) they distort American security priorities by inflating the perceived benefits of large military forces and

“get-tough” policies; and 3) they make it easier for allies to “free-ride,” by encouraging the U.S. to do too much. Thus the U.S. pays a high price for its failure to appreciate the dominant tendency for others to balance. Indeed, the erroneous fear that bandwagoning was likely has probably been the principal intellectual error underlying the most counterproductive excesses in postwar American foreign policy.

This is not to say that bandwagoning never occurs. Three conditions may increase somewhat the generally low tendency for states to bandwagon. First, especially weak states will be more likely to bandwagon, both because they are more vulnerable to pressure and because the capabilities they can add to either side are unlikely to make much difference. Because they can do little to affect the outcome, they are more likely to opt for the winning side.<sup>38</sup> Thus King Leopold of Belgium and Urho Kekkonen of Finland justified their own alliance policies with reference to the special vulnerabilities of small states bordering upon great powers.<sup>39</sup> A further deduction is that weak states may balance against other weak states but may be relatively more likely to bandwagon when confronted by a great power.

Second, weak states are more likely to bandwagon when allies are simply unavailable. Even weak states may be persuaded to balance when they are confident of allied support; in its absence, however, accommodation with the threatening power may be the only viable alternative. Thus a further prerequisite for effective balancing behavior is an active system of diplomatic communication, permitting potential allies to recognize their shared interests and coordinate their responses.<sup>40</sup> If weak states see no possibility of external assistance, accommodation through alignment with the threatening power may be chosen as a last resort. Thus the first Shah of Iran took the British withdrawal from Kandahar in 1881 as a signal to bandwagon with Russia. As he told the British representative, all he had received from Britain was “good advice and honeyed words—nothing

else.”<sup>41</sup> Finland’s foreign policy suggests the same lesson. Finland’s bandwagoning alliance with the Soviet Union after World War II was encouraged by the fact that Finland’s *balancing* alliance with Nazi Germany during the war had alienated the potential allies it might have sought against Soviet pressure.<sup>42</sup>

This means that a concern for credibility is not entirely mistaken. Those who argue for American isolation ignore the possibility that weak states might be forced to bandwagon with other powers, were the prospect of American support eliminated entirely. Yet the opposite error is more common: the exaggerated fear that bandwagoning likely leads the U.S. to squander resources in strategically meaningless conflicts (e.g., Vietnam) in order to reassure allies who are likely to remain loyal in any event.

Taken together, these two factors help explain why great powers are occasionally able to create

spheres of influence. Although strong neighbors will balance, small and weak states in close proximity to a great power are the most likely candidates for bandwagoning. Because they will be the first victims of an attack, because potential allies may be scarce or distant, and because they lack the capabilities to stand alone or alter the balance significantly, accommodating a neighboring great power may occasionally make more sense.

Such circumstances, however, are rare; and such alliances will decay when the disparities that produce them erode.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, even if weak states do bandwagon on occasion, their decisions will have little impact on the global balance of power. For the states that matter, balancing is the rule: they will join forces against the threats posed by the power, proximity, offensive capabilities, and intentions of others.

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## NOTES

1. For representative examples of typical scholarly efforts, consult: Robert Rood and Patrick McGowan, “Alliance Behavior in Balance of Power Systems,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 69, no. 3 (September 1975); George T. Duncan and Randolph Siverson, “Flexibility of Alliance Partner Choice in Multipolar Systems,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, no. 4 (December 1982); R. P. Y. Li and W. R. Thompson, “The Stochastic Process of Alliance Formation Behavior,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 72, no. 3 (December 1978). More traditional works on alliances are: George Liska, *Nations in Alliance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), and Robert L. Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). Useful summaries of the literature on alliances may be found in: Ole Holsti, P. Terrence Hopmann, and John D. Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances* (New York: Wiley—Interscience, 1973), Chapter 1 and Appendix C; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and J. David Singer, “Alliance, Capabilities, and War,” *Political Science Annual*, Vol. 4 (1974); Philip Burgess and David Moore, “Inter-nation Alliances: An Inventory and Appraisal of Propositions,” *Political Science Annual*, Vol. 3 (1973); and Michael Don Ward, “Research Gaps in Alliance Dynamics,” *Monograph Series in International Affairs*, Vol. 19, no. 1 (Denver: University of Denver, Graduate School of International Studies, 1982).
2. My use of the terms “balancing” and “bandwagoning” follows that of Kenneth Waltz in his *Theory of International Politics* (Reading,

- Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979). Arnold Wolfers uses a similar terminology in his essay “The Balance of Power in Theory and Practice,” in *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), pp. 122–124.
3. For impressive analyses of the classical writings on the balance of power, see Edward V. Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance of Power* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1955), Part I; F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), Part I; Inis L. Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), Chapters 2 and 3; Robert Osgood and Robert Tucker, *Force, Order, and Justice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), pp. 96–104 and *passim*; and Martin Wight, “The Balance of Power,” in Martin Wight and Herbert Butterfield, eds., *Diplomatic Investigations* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966). For modern versions of the theory, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Chapter 6; Morton Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: John Wiley, 1957); and Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), Part IV.
  4. As Vattel wrote several centuries ago: “The surest means of preserving this balance of power would be to bring it about that no State should be much superior to the others . . . but this could not be realized without injustice and violence. . . . [It] is simpler, easier, and more just . . . to form alliances in order to make a stand against a very powerful sovereign and prevent him from dominating.” Quoted in Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance of Power*, pp. 61–62.
  5. Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Volume I, The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), pp. 207–208.
  6. Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 178.
  7. In the words of Kenneth Waltz: “Secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them. On the weaker side, they are both more appreciated and safer, provided, of course, that the coalition they join achieves enough defensive or deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking.” See his *Theory of International Politics*, p. 127.
  8. This theme is explored in Ludwig Dehio, *The Precarious Balance* (New York: Vintage, 1965); Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*; and Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance of Power*.
  9. W. Scott Thompson, “The Communist International System,” *Orbis*, Vol. 20, no. 4 (Winter 1977), p. 843.
  10. See William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 434–435; and Gordon L. Craig, *Germany: 1866–1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 303–314. This view was not confined to military circles in Germany. In February 1914, Secretary of State Jagow predicted that Britain would remain neutral in the event of a Continental war, expressing the widespread view that drove German policy prior to World War I. As he told the German Ambassador in London: “We have not built our fleet in vain, and in my opinion, people in England will seriously ask themselves whether it will be just that simple and without danger to play the role of France’s guardian angel against us.” Quoted

- in Imanuel Geiss, *July 1914* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967), pp. 24–25.
11. Quoted in Seyom Brown, *The Faces of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 217.
  12. Quoted in Committee on International Relations, “The Soviet Union and the Third World: Watershed in Great Power Policy?,” U.S. House of Representatives, 97th Congress, 1st session (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), pp. 157–158.
  13. “President Reagan’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress on Central America,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 1983, p. A–12. In the same speech, Reagan also said, “If Central America were to fall, what would the consequences be for our position in Asia and Europe and for alliances such as NATO. . . . Which ally, which friend would trust us then?”
  14. See Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1982), pp. 234–235, 246–250; Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence* (New York: Praeger, 1972), pp. 394–398; and A.J.P. Taylor, *The First World War* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), pp. 88–90, 153.
  15. See Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, pp. 276–277; Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (London: Pelican Books, 1966), pp. 437–443; and Joachim Fest, *Hitler* (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp. 583–584, 592–593.
  16. The preeminent example of balance of power theory focusing exclusively on the distribution of capabilities is Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Chapter 6. For examples of theorists who acknowledge that other factors can be important, see Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance of Power*, pp. 25, 45–47, 60–62.
  17. In World War I, the alliance of Great Britain, France, and Russia controlled 27.9 percent of world industrial production, while Germany and Austria together controlled only 19.2 percent. With Russia out of the war but the United States joining Britain and France, the percentage opposing the Dual Alliance reached 51.7 percent, an advantage of more than 2 to 1. In World War II, the defense expenditures of the U.S., Great Britain, and the Soviet Union exceeded those of Germany by roughly 4.5 to 1. Even allowing for Germany’s control of Europe and the need to fight Japan, the Grand Alliance possessed an enormous advantage in latent capabilities. Thus balancing against *power* was not the sole explanation for these alliances. For these and other statistics on the relative power in these two wars, see Paul M. Kennedy, “The First World War and the International Power System,” *International Security*, Vol. 9, no. 1 (Summer 1984), pp. 7–40; and *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 309–315.
  18. For a summary of these ideas, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 25–88. Kennan’s own thoughts are found in his *Realities of American Foreign Policy* (New York: New American Library, 1951), p. 10. Lippmann’s still compelling analysis is found in his *The Cold War: A Study of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1947).
  19. Quoted in Bernadotte Schmitt, *The Coming of the War in 1914* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1968), Vol. 2, p. 115.
  20. Castlereagh’s policy is described in Harold Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1946), pp. 205–206. Bismarck’s statement is quoted

- in William L. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 197.
21. See Harvey Starr and Benjamin A. Most, "The Substance and Study of Borders in International Relations Research," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 20 (1976). For a discussion of the relationship between power and distance, see Kenneth A. Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), pp. 229–230, 245–247. For an interesting practical critique, see Albert Wohlstetter, "Illusions of Distance," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 46, no. 2 (Fall 1968).
  22. Quoted in Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo—German Antagonism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980), p. 421.
  23. Kautilya's analysis ran as follows: "The king who is situated anywhere immediately on the circumference of the conqueror's territory is termed the enemy. The king who is likewise situated close to the enemy, but separated from the conqueror only by the enemy is termed the friend (of the conqueror). . . . In front of the conqueror and close to the enemy, there happened to be situated kings such as the conqueror's friend, next to him the enemy's friend, and next to the last the conqueror's friend's friend, and next, the enemy's friend's friend." See "Arthashastra" (Science of Politics), in Paul A. Seabury, ed., *Balance of Power* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), p. 8.
  24. The best discussions of the implications of offense and defense are Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, no. 2 (January 1978); Stephen W. Van Evera, "Causes of War" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1984); and George H. Quester, *Offense and Defense in the International System* (New York: Wiley, 1977).
  25. See Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments*, pp. 3–5; Raymond J. Sontag, *European Diplomatic History, 1871–1932* (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1933), pp. 4–5; Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," p. 189; and Quester, *Offense and Defense in the International System*, pp. 105–106.
  26. As Imanuel Geiss notes: "Finding an agreement with Britain along German lines without a substantial naval agreement thus amounted to squaring the circle." See his *German Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 131. See also Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo—German Antagonism*, pp. 416–423.
  27. Thus alliance formation becomes more frenetic when the offense is believed to have the advantage: great powers will balance more vigorously while weak states seek protection by bandwagoning more frequently. A world of tight alliances and few neutral states is the likely result.
  28. For a discussion of Libya's international position, see Claudia Wright, "Libya and the West: Headlong Into Confrontation?," *International Affairs* (London), Vol. 58, no. 1 (Winter 1981–82), pp. 13–41.
  29. See Craig, *Germany: 1866–1945*, pp. 101, 242–247, and Chapter 10; Geiss, *German Foreign Policy*, pp. 66–68; and Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo—German Antagonism*, Chapters 14 and 20.
  30. "Memorandum by Sir Eyre Crowe on the Present State of British Relations with France and Germany, January 1, 1907," in G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914* (London: British Foreign Office, 1928), Volume 3,



- pp. 403 and *passim* (emphasis added). See also G.W. Monger, *The End of Isolation: British Foreign Policy 1900–1907* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1963), pp. 313–315.
31. Quoted in Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War* Volume 3, p. 458 (emphasis added).
  32. Thus both Napoleon and Hitler underestimated the costs of aggression by assuming their potential enemies would bandwagon. After Munich, for example, Hitler dismissed the likelihood he would be opposed by claiming that the leaders of France and Britain were “little worms.” Napoleon apparently believed that “England cannot reasonably make war on us unaided” and assumed that England would remain pacified after the Peace of Amiens. On these points, see Fest, *Hitler*, pp. 594–595; Liska, *Nations in Alliance*, p. 45; and Geoffrey Bruun, *Europe and the French Imperium* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1938), p. 118. Because Hitler and Napoleon believed in a bandwagoning world, they were unwisely eager to go to war.
  33. This situation is analogous to Robert Jervis’s distinction between the spiral model and the deterrence model. The former calls for appeasement, the latter for opposition to a suspected aggressor. Balancing and bandwagoning are the alliance equivalents of deterring and appeasing. See Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Chapter 3.
  34. The French attempt to contain Germany after World War I was undermined both by the Locarno Treaty (which guaranteed the French border with Germany but failed to provide similar guarantees for its allies) and by the French adoption of a defensive military doctrine, which made it impossible for it come to the aid of its allies. See Telford Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace* (New York: Vintage, 1980), pp. 111–112; and Richard D. Challener, *The French Theory of the Nation in Arms* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 264–265. For the effects of Soviet pressure on Turkey, see: George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 134–138; and Bruce R. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 355–378.
  35. See Jack S. Levy, “Theories of General War,” unpublished ms., 1984. (An extensively revised version of this paper will be published in *World Politics*, April 1985.)
  36. For evidence and analysis on this point, see Stephen M. Walt, “The Origins of Alliances” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1983), especially Chapter 6.
  37. See Mahnaz Zehra Ispahani, “Alone Together: Regional Security Arrangements in Southern Africa and the Arabian Gulf,” *International Security*, Vol. 8, 1914 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), no. 4 (Spring 1984), pp. 152–175.
  38. See Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers*, p. 11.
  39. As King Leopold explained Belgian neutrality after World War I, “an alliance, even if purely defensive, does not lead to the goal [of security], for no matter how prompt the help of an ally might be, it would not come until after the invader’s attack which will be overwhelming. . . .” Quoted in Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers*, pp. 111–112. Kekkonen of Finland argued for accommodation with the U.S.S.R. by saying: “A small state cannot stand

forever armed to the teeth... the first to be overrun by the enemy, and devoid of political importance to lend any significance to its word when decisions over war and peace are being taken..." See Urho Kekkonen, *A President's View*, trans. Gregory Coogan (London: Heinemann, 1982), pp. 42–43.

40. One reason for Rome's durable hegemony in the ancient world was the fact that its various opponents lacked the diplomatic means to coordinate opposition against Rome effectively. See Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 192, 199–200. When a workable diplomatic system was established in the Renaissance, prospects for European hegemony declined drastically. On this point, see Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power*, p. 16; Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 106 and Chapter 7; Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), Chapters 13–16; and Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), Chapter 1.
41. Quoted in C.J. Lowe, *The Reluctant Imperialists* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 85.
42. See Fred Singleton, "The Myth of Finlandisation," *International Affairs* (London), Vol. 57, no. 2 (Spring 1981), especially pp. 276–278. Singleton points out that the Western allies approved the 1944 armistice between Finland and the U.S.S.R. (which established Soviet predominance there) in 1947.
43. This seems to be true both in Latin America and Eastern Europe. As the relative power of both superpowers has declined, the ability of states in their respective spheres to defy the hegemonic power has increased. Obviously, this tendency is more pronounced in the Western Hemisphere than Eastern Europe, because geography makes it easier for the Soviets to enforce their control.

# Reading 2.5

## The Melian Dialogue

Thucydides

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### SIXTEENTH YEAR OF THE WAR—THE MELIAN CONFERENCE—FATE OF MELOS

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The next summer Alcibiades sailed with twenty ships to Argos and seized the suspected persons still left of the Lacedaemonian faction to the number of three hundred, whom the Athenians forthwith lodged in the neighbouring islands of their empire. The Athenians also made an expedition against the isle of Melos with thirty ships of their own, six Chian, and two Lesbian vessels, sixteen hundred heavy infantry, three hundred archers, and twenty mounted archers from Athens, and about fifteen hundred heavy infantry from the allies and the islanders. The Melians are a colony of Lacedaemon that would not submit to the Athenians like the other islanders, and at first remained neutral and took no part in the struggle, but afterwards upon the Athenians using violence and plundering their territory, assumed an attitude of open hostility. Cleomedes, son of Lycomedes, and Tisias, son of Tisimachus, the generals, encamping in their territory with the above armament, before doing any harm to their land, sent envoys to negotiate. These the Melians did not bring before the people, but bade them state the object of their mission to the magistrates and the few; upon which the Athenian envoys spoke as follows:

**ATHENIANS.** Since the negotiations are not to go on before the people, in order that we may not be

able to speak straight on without interruption, and deceive the ears of the multitude by seductive arguments which would pass without refutation (for we know that this is the meaning of our being brought before the few), what if you who sit there were to pursue a method more cautious still? Make no set speech yourselves, but take us up at whatever you do not like, and settle that before going any farther. And first tell us if this proposition of ours suits you.

The Melian commissioners answered:

**MELIANS.** To the fairness of quietly instructing each other as you propose there is nothing to object; but your military preparations are too far advanced to agree with what you say, as we see you are come to be judges in your own cause, and that all we can reasonably expect from this negotiation is war, if we prove to have right on our side and refuse to submit, and in the contrary case, slavery.

**ATHENIANS.** If you have met to reason about presentiments of the future, or for anything else than to consult for the safety of your state upon the facts that you see before you, we will give over; otherwise we will go on.

**MELIANS.** It is natural and excusable for men in our position to turn more ways than one both in thought and utterance. However, the question in this conference is, as you say, the safety of our country; and the discussion, if you please, can proceed in the way which you propose.

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Source: Thucydides. "The Melian Dialogue." *Excerpts from The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book V, Chapters 84–116.

**ATHENIANS.** For ourselves, we shall not trouble you with specious pretences—either of how we have a right to our empire because we overthrew the Mede, or are now attacking you because of wrong that you have done us—and make a long speech which would not be believed; and in return we hope that you, instead of thinking to influence us by saying that you did not join the Lacedaemonians, although their colonists, or that you have done us no wrong, will aim at what is feasible, holding in view the real sentiments of us both; since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.

**MELIANS.** As we think, at any rate, it is expedient—we speak as we are obliged, since you enjoin us to let right alone and talk only of interest—that you should not destroy what is our common protection, the privilege of being allowed in danger to invoke what is fair and right, and even to profit by arguments not strictly valid if they can be got to pass current. And you are as much interested in this as any, as your fall would be a signal for the heaviest vengeance and an example for the world to meditate upon.

**ATHENIANS.** The end of our empire, if end it should, does not frighten us: a rival empire like Lacedaemon, even if Lacedaemon was our real antagonist, is not so terrible to the vanquished as subjects who by themselves attack and overpower their rulers. This, however, is a risk that we are content to take. We will now proceed to show you that we come here in the interest of our empire, and that we shall say what we are now going to say, for the preservation of your country; as we would fain exercise that empire over you without trouble, and see you preserved for the good of us both.

**MELIANS.** And how, pray, could it turn out as good for us to serve as for you to rule?

**ATHENIANS.** Because you would have the advantage of submitting before suffering the worst, and we should gain by not destroying you.

**MELIANS.** So that you would not consent to our being neutral, friends instead of enemies, but allies of neither side.

**ATHENIANS.** No; for your hostility cannot so much hurt us as your friendship will be an argument to our subjects of our weakness, and your enmity of our power.

**MELIANS.** Is that your subjects' idea of equity, to put those who have nothing to do with you in the same category with peoples that are most of them your own colonists, and some conquered rebels?

**ATHENIANS.** As far as right goes they think one has as much of it as the other, and that if any maintain their independence it is because they are strong, and that if we do not molest them it is because we are afraid; so that besides extending our empire we should gain in security by your subjection; the fact that you are islanders and weaker than others rendering it all the more important that you should not succeed in baffling the masters of the sea.

**MELIANS.** But do you consider that there is no security in the policy which we indicate? For here again if you debar us from talking about justice and invite us to obey your interest, we also must explain ours, and try to persuade you, if the two happen to coincide. How can you avoid making enemies of all existing neutrals who shall look at case from it that one day or another you will attack them? And what is this but to make greater the enemies that you have already, and to force others to become so who would otherwise have never thought of it?

**ATHENIANS.** Why, the fact is that continentals generally give us but little alarm; the liberty which they enjoy will long prevent their taking precautions against us; it is rather islanders like yourselves, outside our empire, and subjects smarting under

the yoke, who would be the most likely to take a rash step and lead themselves and us into obvious danger.

**MELIANS.** Well then, if you risk so much to retain your empire, and your subjects to get rid of it, it were surely great baseness and cowardice in us who are still free not to try everything that can be tried, before submitting to your yoke.

**ATHENIANS.** Not if you are well advised, the contest not being an equal one, with honour as the prize and shame as the penalty, but a question of self-preservation and of not resisting those who are far stronger than you are.

**MELIANS.** But we know that the fortune of war is sometimes more impartial than the disproportion of numbers might lead one to suppose; to submit is to give ourselves over to despair, while action still preserves for us a hope that we may stand erect.

**ATHENIANS.** Hope, danger's comforter, may be indulged in by those who have abundant resources, if not without loss at all events without ruin; but its nature is to be extravagant, and those who go so far as to put their all upon the venture see it in its true colours only when they are ruined; but so long as the discovery would enable them to guard against it, it is never found wanting. Let not this be the case with you, who are weak and hang on a single turn of the scale; nor be like the vulgar, who, abandoning such security as human means may still afford, when visible hopes fail them in extremity, turn to invisible, to prophecies and oracles, and other such inventions that delude men with hopes to their destruction.

**MELIANS.** You may be sure that we are as well aware as you of the difficulty of contending against your power and fortune, unless the terms be equal. But we trust that the gods may grant us fortune as good as yours, since we are just men fighting against unjust, and that what we want in power will be made up by the alliance of the Lacedaemonians, who are bound, if only for very shame, to come to the aid of

their kindred. Our confidence, therefore, after all is not so utterly irrational.

**ATHENIANS.** When you speak of the favour of the gods, we may as fairly hope for that as yourselves; neither our pretensions nor our conduct being in any way contrary to what men believe of the gods, or practise among themselves. Of the gods we believe, and of men we know, that by a necessary law of their nature they rule wherever they can. And it is not as if we were the first to make this law, or to act upon it when made: we found it existing before us, and shall leave it to exist for ever after us; all we do is to make use of it, knowing that you and everybody else, having the same power as we have, would do the same as we do. Thus, as far as the gods are concerned, we have no fear and no reason to fear that we shall be at a disadvantage. But when we come to your notion about the Lacedaemonians, which leads you to believe that shame will make them help you, here we bless your simplicity but do not envy your folly. The Lacedaemonians, when their own interests or their country's laws are in question, are the worthiest men alive; of their conduct towards others much might be said, but no clearer idea of it could be given than by shortly saying that of all the men we know they are most conspicuous in considering what is agreeable honourable, and what is expedient just. Such a way of thinking does not promise much for the safety which you now unreasonably count upon.

**MELIANS.** But it is for this very reason that we now trust to their respect for expediency to prevent them from betraying the Melians, their colonists, and thereby losing the confidence of their friends in Hellas and helping their enemies.

**ATHENIANS.** Then you do not adopt the view that expediency goes with security, while justice and honour cannot be followed without danger; and danger the Lacedaemonians generally court as little as possible.

**MELIANS.** But we believe that they would be more likely to face even danger for our sake, and with more confidence than for others, as our nearness to Peloponnese makes it easier for them to act, and our common blood ensures our fidelity.

**ATHENIANS.** Yes, but what an intending ally trusts to is not the goodwill of those who ask his aid, but a decided superiority of power for action; and the Lacedaemonians look to this even more than others. At least, such is their distrust of their home resources that it is only with numerous allies that they attack a neighbour; now is it likely that while we are masters of the sea they will cross over to an island?

**MELIANS.** But they would have others to send. The Cretan Sea is a wide one, and it is more difficult for those who command it to intercept others, than for those who wish to elude them to do so safely. And should the Lacedaemonians miscarry in this, they would fall upon your land, and upon those left of your allies whom Brasidas did not reach; and instead of places which are not yours, you will have to fight for your own country and your own confederacy.

**ATHENIANS.** Some diversion of the kind you speak of you may one day experience, only to learn, as others have done, that the Athenians never once yet withdrew from a siege for fear of any. But we are struck by the fact that, after saying you would consult for the safety of your country, in all this discussion you have mentioned nothing which men might trust in and think to be saved by. Your strongest arguments depend upon hope and the future, and your actual resources are too scanty, as compared with those arrayed against you, for you to come out victorious. You will therefore show great blindness of judgment, unless, after allowing us to retire, you can find some counsel more prudent than this. You will surely not be caught by that idea of disgrace, which in dangers that are disgraceful, and at the same time too plain

to be mistaken, proves so fatal to mankind; since in too many cases the very men that have their eyes perfectly open to what they are rushing into, let the thing called disgrace, by the mere influence of a seductive name, lead them on to a point at which they become so enslaved by the phrase as in fact to fall wilfully into hopeless disaster, and incur disgrace more disgraceful as the companion of error, than when it comes as the result of misfortune. This, if you are well advised, you will guard against; and you will not think it dishonourable to submit to the greatest city in Hellas, when it makes you the moderate offer of becoming its tributary ally, without ceasing to enjoy the country that belongs to you; nor when you have the choice given you between war and security, will you be so blinded as to choose the worse. And it is certain that those who do not yield to their equals, who keep terms with their superiors, and are moderate towards their inferiors, on the whole succeed best. Think over the matter, therefore, after our withdrawal, and reflect once and again that it is for your country that you are consulting, that you have not more than one, and that upon this one deliberation depends its prosperity or ruin.

The Athenians now withdrew from the conference; and the Melians, left to themselves, came to a decision corresponding with what they had maintained in the discussion, and answered:

Our resolution, Athenians, is the same as it was at first. We will not in a moment deprive of freedom a city that has been inhabited these seven hundred years; but we put our trust in the fortune by which the gods have preserved it until now, and in the help of men, that is, of the Lacedaemonians; and so we will try and save ourselves. Meanwhile we invite you to allow us to be friends to you and foes to neither party, and to retire from our country after making such a treaty as shall seem fit to us both.

Such was the answer of the Melians. The Athenians now departing from the conference said:

Well, you alone, as it seems to us, judging from these resolutions, regard what is future as more certain than what is before your eyes, and what is out of sight, in your eagerness, as already coming to pass; and as you have staked most on, and trusted most in, the Lacedaemonians, your fortune, and your hopes, so will you be most completely deceived.

The Athenian envoys now returned to the army; and the Melians showing no signs of yielding, the generals at once betook themselves to hostilities, and drew a line of circumvallation round the Melians, dividing the work among the different states. Subsequently the Athenians returned with most of their army, leaving behind them a certain number of their own citizens and of the allies to keep guard by land and sea. The force thus left stayed on and besieged the place.

About the same time the Argives invaded the territory of Phlius and lost eighty men cut off in an ambush by the Phliasians and Argive exiles. Meanwhile the Athenians at Pylos took so much plunder from the Lacedaemonians that the latter, although they still refrained from breaking off the treaty and going to war with Athens, yet proclaimed that any of their people that chose might plunder

the Athenians. The Corinthians also commenced hostilities with the Athenians for private quarrels of their own; but the rest of the Peloponnesians stayed quiet. Meanwhile the Melians attacked by night and took the part of the Athenian lines over against the market, and killed some of the men, and brought in corn and all else that they could find useful to them, and so returned and kept quiet, while the Athenians took measures to keep better guard in future.

Summer was now over. The next winter the Lacedaemonians intended to invade the Argive territory, but arriving at the frontier found the sacrifices for crossing unfavourable, and went back again. This intention of theirs gave the Argives suspicions of certain of their fellow citizens, some of whom they arrested; others, however, escaped them. About the same time the Melians again took another part of the Athenian lines which were but feebly garrisoned. Reinforcements afterwards arriving from Athens in consequence, under the command of Philocrates, son of Demeas, the siege was now pressed vigorously; and some treachery taking place inside, the Melians surrendered at discretion to the Athenians, who put to death all the grown men whom they took, and sold the women and children for slaves, and subsequently sent out five hundred colonists and inhabited the place themselves.

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