

## Original Paper

# A Conceptual Difficulty in Theories of International Politics

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### Abstract

*Hans Morgenthau's theory of power realism is still popular. Professor J. Mearsheimer has now published a number of lectures spelling out the theory of structural realism for understanding the state. Can we account for the present wars with it?*

### 1. Introduction

If one translates all the resources that go into warfare and through warfare into costs, we have a measure of the costs of war. In CW I would include only the material costs but exclude human suffering. Imagine that a portion of CW would be used for peace. With a small portion of CW one could achieve a lot. I will discuss a few examples.

The school of thought limiting government to the pursuit of narrow interests or limited objectives is *realism*. It may be traced back to Sun Tsu, Thucydides, Machiavel and Clausewitz. *Modern* realism is to be found with Morgenthau, a German Jew, forced to flee Nazi Germany like Kelsen. Incidentally, before going to the US, both taught in Geneva although with contradictory messages. Morgenthau spelled out the Hobbesian Implications for international relations theory, whereas H. Kelsen looked upon the state as embedded in international law.

Morgenthau started from the micro theory of society as: *homo hominem lupus est*, and applied the same assumption to the macro relations between governments or states. Here we have the rock theorem of realism: Anarchy in international relations. Yet, what would a cooperative perspective entail?

### 2. Gaza

The small territory in the Eastern Mediterranean has been governed by various regimes. It is now under full occupation by Israel with terrible consequences for its people. However, in a possible world Gaza could be no different from other parts of the Mediterranean: beach, hotel and restaurant. There would be Arab capital plus the Palestine workforce and the airport that once was.

### 3. Israel

A cooperative approach to Palestine in stead of warfare would be based upon mutual respect for a shared regime. One may mention Said's one state solution -too naive. Or Sach's two States idea - the Oslo solution. But this is a thing of the past merely. Arafat should have accepted it, providing a base for further demands on Israel, besides a new Parliament and an airport.

The 7/10 atrocities committed by Hamas and Islamic state were extremely foolish, as it triggered a most violent reaction by Israel. The suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza will go down in history, as e.g. the Armenian genocide.

The *Deobandi* strategy against the colonisation of the Jewish settlers does not work. For every war Israel has grown in size. And calling upon foreign powers leads only to warfare. It remains to be seen how Israel will treat Gaza and the West Bank in the future. Had Palestinians accepted the UN partition 1948 they had been much better off. The CWs of the various wars since 1948 would cover the reintroduced Arab population from the refugee camps.

### 4. Ukraine

There are two opposing hypotheses about the Ukraine war. The most believed hypothesis looks upon the war as Putin's aggressive invasion and annexation. The other hypothesis points at USA and CIA together with EU pulling the Ukraine westwards.

Out of the uproar in 2004 and 2013-14 developed a full scale war in 2022 with very heavy losses on both sides and with Ukrainian cities levelled down. A cooperative solution would have much benefitted both countries due to colossal CW.

The attrition war in Ukraine is special in several ways. Not only is the war extremely costly in terms of casualties and high tech weapons, but it is a proxy war between the NATO and Russia. Some countries have provided billions, whereas Ukraine puts up soldiers—for how long?

If Ukraine wins the war Russia may loose its naval bas in the Black Sea. If Russia wins then Ukraine loses territories. The Russian invasion has led to a spike in military spending amidst a fear for nuclear warfare. Thus, for instance Sweden and Finland decided to join NATO. The Swedish transition from neutrality was remarkable, as the Left accepted a *domino* theory: after Ukraine Russia will attack Western countries.

It had been much better for Zelenskyj to swerve, accepting neutrality. The Ukraine war is a negative sum game. But can states go for a cooperative strategy?

### 5. Morgenthau: State Egoism

The book *Politics among Nations* (1948) made realism the basic paradigm in international politics teaching. Morgenthau derived state egoism from human nature. Mearsheimer disagrees, avoiding speaking about human nature. Instead he suggests:

- (1) Big states are driven by the goal of a regional or global hegemon.

- (2) Today there are 3 regional hegemonies: USA, China and Russia.
- (3) The regional hegemonies are challenged for power in various ways to which they ultimately respond with war.
- (4) International politics is a set of geopolitical games little related to domestic politics.

One may wish to include India and Iran under (2), but Mearsheimer's axioms only make sense, if we have a clear concept of the state. We do not.

The book *Bringing the State Back In* (2010) contributed to the illusion that the state is somehow an actor. According to Mearsheimer, the US has had the regional or global hegemon goal since 1945, but can a state have this means-end motive? The problem is *reification*.

## 6. Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness

The social reality consists of human behaviour that is orientated in terms of meaning. Corporation and organisation reduces to human cooperation with individual actions attributed to "state" by institutions. The state of a country 'a legal fiction' - is basically a hierarchy of people in action.

The ambition to become a regional hegemon is to be found with the top of the hierarchy. If peace had played a major role in the preferences of Washington leaders, there would not have been the failed wars of Vietnam and in the Middle East. The role of global hegemon turned out to be extremely costly in both manpower and dollars (CW).

When raising the possibility of the Ukraine and Georgien joining NATO, this move cannot be explained as regional hegemony gaming—a "natural" policy step. Instead it invited disaster from which we live now.

Mearsheimer is though right like Sachs in condemning the Ukraine war as due to faulty information and muddled preferences in Washington.

## 7. Foreign Policy Preferences

Mearsheimer like Morgenthau advocate the geopolitical perspective, invented by a Swedish professor in Uppsala university. Thus, Mearsheimer states that China has the means-end to become regional hegemon of Asia. Mearsheimer relates this subjective orientation of the Communist hierarchy to supposedly objective factors like economics *inter alia*. Assertiveness against Taiwan and India reflects the foolish ambition of the Communist party and Xi to use threat for *inter alia* domestic and subjective means-end.

## 8. Conclusion

Mearsheimer wants us to understand big power politics as the fight over regional hegemony. At the same time he interprets the Ukraine war as a misguided US provocation. Is there not a contradiction here? Why would the search for regional hegemony entail making NATO expansion close to another regional hegemon? Such is the state, says Mearsheimer. But it all depends on preferences and

information with the US hierarchy. The costs of opportunism and misinformation are enormous for all involved. If the US hierarchy dreamt of turning Sevastopol into a NATO marine base, then it is time to update beliefs. Sweden gave up its neutrality as a result of the Ukraine invasion. Thus NATO controls the seaway to Sankt Petersburg. Finally, it may be noted the top political hierarchy plans to help Ukraine by sending ammunition and fighter planes. Will all this make Sweden as safe as neutral Switzerland, depending not only on the steady descent into totalitarianism in Russia but also domestic politics in the US.

Judged by the real outcomes - from the wars in Vietnam to Gaza - the concept of global or regional hegemon is a figment of imagination.

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## Note

Following professor Mearsheimer the so-called realist framework is the proper theoretical approach to international political relations. He is strongly convinced that *STRUCTURAL REALISM* and not moralism or legalism -sometimes "liberalism"- is the correct theory of "states". But Mearsheimer only adduces his adhesion to Clausewitz' standpoints as arguments pro.

Realists like professor Mearsheimer have the following core beliefs:

Tenet 1: Foreign policy is different from domestic policy.

Tenet 2: The set of actors in international affairs are states.

Tenet 3: The dominant players are the hegemons maximising their own security.

Tenet 4: Anarchy is the basic condition for state interaction, as morals or law carry little weight.

Tenet 5: Conflict is endemic in international relations where warfare is the last resort.

Tenet 2 and 3 are opaque. Professor Mearsheimer has put up a large number of YouTube videos to develop his theory. I will focus upon them below when raising a few points of criticism.