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Analysing John Mearsheimer's Idea of Offensive Realism in a Changing World Order

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Abstract - Hans Morgenthau's introduction of "realism" as a framework for the study of international affairs was almost fifty years ago. Not only has the strategy survived a sustained onslaught from non-internal sources like liberal institutionalism, the democratic peace school, and "constructivism," but it has also endured a clearly polarizing trend from its inception. There are now several subgroups, each brandishing a different adverb to distinguish itself and announce a different focus or variety. An ascendant China in Northeast Asia is the most worrisome prospect for the United States in the early twenty-first century. Whether or whether China's economy maintains its fast rate of modernization is crucial to the country's chances of becoming a prospective hegemon. The Soviet Union during the Cold War presented a compelling basis for a robust and cohesive Atlantic Alliance. Beyond its own safety, Western Europe's destiny was the United States' primary geopolitical priority throughout the Cold War.

Keywords - Realism, John Meareimer's, China, U.S., Cold War, World

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INTRODUCTION

How do realists feel we should respond to China's rising power? There is an underlying divide between liberals and realists, with the former classifying themselves as "engagers" and the latter as "containers," a difference that is often used in scholarly discussions. While this difference captures some basic truth, most analysts see these as archetypes and approach the complicated challenges involved with depth and expertise. One notable academic, John Mearsheimer (2001), takes an intentionally realist stance and calls for a concerted, expensive effort to counter China's rising strength and influence rather than for mere containment. While I agree that this is a realism viewpoint, in this post I argue that it is not the realist viewpoint. Various ideas and policy recommendations may be derived from the realism approach, and they do not all agree. In particular, classical realism methods provide alternatives to Mearsheimer's preferred strategies.

Because of this, realists of any persuasion cannot be blasé about China's growth and its consequences. That's because they can't. In particular, classical realists should be concerned about China's rising might. The rise of new great powers is always met with tremendous concern from a classical realist viewpoint, since it is assumed that emerging nations would want to increase their global influence in proportion to their growing might. To show why a neorealist perspective is necessary for describing war and peace within the international system, it is necessary to first understand what neorealism is. Even though neorealism has its roots in classical realism, it stands on its own apart from its predecessor. Anarchy, defined as "a circumstance in which there exists no centralized authority above nation-states that maintains the rule of law," is a feature of the international system, which is recognized by both theories. According to neorealist theory, states have to become more powerful since there is no assurance of peace, or, more precisely, of the survival of individual states. In contrast, classical realism shows that the need for authority is intrinsic to the human condition. According to Neorealism, nation-states are compelled to pursue dominance in the international arena by the systemic pressure of anarchy.

There has been a range of responses to China's ascent. For those who look on the bright side, China's ascent means the already low probability of war will further increase. But others are more reserved, arguing that it is impossible to know what the future contains. The emergence of China might spark war, but it also could not. Those who are pessimistic tend to believe that China's ascent would eventually lead to increased political tensions. History will repeat itself when China rises and the United States sinks, much as Thucydides predicted that the Peleponnesian War would occur when Athens became more powerful than Sparta. One such pessimist is John Mearsheimer, widely considered to be the most vocal critic of China's "peaceful growth" (a term used to describe Beijing's diplomatic efforts to allay concerns about the "China Threat"). His pessimism about China's peaceful growth is grounded on an appealing formulation of aggressive realism. This article seeks to determine whether or not Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism offers a consistent foundation for the prediction that China's ascent would be

accompanied by violence. Mearsheimer's theory provided in The Tragedy of Big Power Politics, as well as his previous publications (1990, 1995), as well as his particular writings on the issue of the emergence of China (2005, 2006a, 2010), will be evaluated to provide an answer to this question.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nicholas Ross Smith et.al (2022) Since the beginning of the conflict in February 2022, the relevance of 'realism' in understanding Russia's choice to invade Ukraine has been a hotly debated subject not just in International Relations but in broader public intellectual conversation. Professor of International Relations at the University of Chicago and notable offensive realism John J. Mearsheimer has been a key voice in this discussion. This essay argues that although Mearsheimer is a realist, his brand of aggressive realism is only one of several realist explanations for the Ukraine conflict. It is argued that classical and neoclassical realist frameworks, which go beyond the apparent dominance of structural realism (the branch of realism to which Mearsheimer's offensive realism also belongs), can provide more nuanced and, ultimately, convincing arguments as to why Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to invade Ukraine. This is due to the fact that both classical and neoclassical realism are capable of combining findings from non-realist disciplines, such as the notions of civilization and ontological security, into an overall power politics framework. Neither classical nor neoclassical realism provides a foolproof explanation for why a state like Russia took an action like invading Ukraine, but they do show that realism does not have to be about international power systems alone.

Myšička, Stanislav (2018) China's foreign policy is slowly becoming one of the key issues in international relations studies because of the country's massive economic, social, and to some degree political developments. Whether or if China will become the basis of future status quo in international affairs is one of the most crucial topics about China's expanding military and economic might. John Mearsheimer's thesis of offensive realism posits that, in a highly competitive and anarchic environment, strong countries will persistently expand their might with the objective of gaining hegemony in order to guarantee their existence. As Mearsheimer sees it, China's rise to regional power in Asia will prompt the current hegemon, the United States, to take countermeasures. In this study, I demonstrate that the theory of offensive realism lacks theoretical precision and empirical evidence in the author-selected situations.

Smith, Nicholas & Dawson, Grant (2022) With the beginning of the conflict in February 2022, the relevance of 'realism' in understanding Russia's choice to invade Ukraine has been a hotly debated subject not just in International Relations but in broader public intellectual conversation. John J. Mearsheimer, a renowned offensive realism and a Professor of International Affairs at the University of Chicago, has been a significant commentator on this issue. Although Mearsheimer is a realist, this essay argues that there are other realist theories that are just as capable of explaining the Ukrainian conflict. However, it is argued that classical and neoclassical realist frameworks offer more nuanced and, ultimately, convincing arguments for why Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to invade Ukraine, as opposed to the apparent hegemony of structural realism (the branch of realism to which Mearsheimer's offensive realism belongs). Despite the fact that neither classical nor neoclassical realism provides perfect answers, they both show that realism is not limited to discussing international power systems and may provide nuanced reasons for why a state like Russia opted to take an action like invading Ukraine.

Pashakhanlou, Arash (2017) evaluates Mearsheimer's writings on dread. This question exemplifies how his talks on fear center on exaggerated threats and how these fears are ingrained in society. Concerns about anarchy, unpredictability, survival, and capacities, as well as aggressiveness in the form of security competition and conflict, are at the forefront of Mearsheimer's offensive realism. His fear-based empirical explanation of international politics touches on a wide range of topics, including but not limited to deceit, demographics, secrecy, collaboration, and passing the blame.

Pashakhanlou, Arash (2013) blames the design of the international system for the unfortunate fact that even governments with a strong will to live must take part in an endless war for dominance. This essay provides a thorough analysis of the reasoning behind this tragic worldview and the explanatory capacity of offensive realism. This extensive criticism of offensive realism shows that the theory has many flaws in its explanatory model and is unable to rationally produce the brutish reality it assumes. These results show that, even when evaluated on its own terms, aggressive realism fails to provide meaningful theoretical lenses for explaining and comprehending international politics.

BIPOLAR VS MULTIPOLAR

In the global system, power may be represented in a variety of ways. It may be done, for example, by thinking about various forms of "polarity" and how they relate to certain eras in history or the current day. The Cold War was emblematic of the world's bipolar order. When two powers share power equally, the system is said to be bipolar. During that time, the United States was on one side and the Soviet Union was on the other, with each group gathering its friends inside its own area of influence. A heated discussion ensued after the conclusion of the Cold War about how to best characterize the established order. Others argued that it was a

unipolar system since there was still just one surviving superpower. Charles Krauthammer's term "unipolar moment" captures the idea that the United States is currently experiencing something never before seen in history: a situation in which one state is so much more powerful than the others in terms of economy, military, and politics that it will take another generation or more for an equal competitor of equal stature (a peer) to emerge. There are three reasons why war is more probable under multipolarity than under bipolarity. The first is an increase in potential battlefield situations. because a multipolar system has more pairs that might end up in conflict. For a second, a multipolar world is more prone to power imbalances. hence, major powers are more likely to be victorious in battle. creating greater obstacles to deterrence and increasing the likelihood of conflict. Finally, in a multipolar world, governments are more likely to overestimate their power to force or conquer another state when in reality they do not.

It has been stated by some that we have entered a time of multipolarity in the globe. Multipolarity, which depicts a system with numerous conflicting powers, has been the norm throughout history. When WWII weakened European strength, the last recognized multipolar system collapsed, making way for the Cold War bipolar system. The rise of international organizations (like the United Nations) that compete with and frequently restrain the authority of nations is another example of how multipolarity is represented today. With the intensifying competition between the United States and a developing China, some have speculated that bipolarity might resurface in the twenty-first century. Some have speculated that tripolarity may develop, with a revived Russia (or another emerging power) joining the United States and China. While these views take historical patterns as their point of departure, the current system can also be seen as multiplexity, a new type of order in which multiple systems coexist without necessarily being at odds with one another (much like the idea of different movies screening under one roof in a multiplex cinema).

Bipolarity and the future of U.S.-China relations

The international order is undergoing its most significant change in at least 25 years as a result of China's economic, political, and military ascent during the previous two decades. It is becoming more apparent that the "unipolar moment" in international politics is nearing its twilight, despite the fact that there is no agreement on the future of China's ascent or the influence it will have on the global distribution of power or on world politics more generally. As time goes on, the United States will continue to dominate international politics. It will take China decades to catch up to the United States in terms of total power assets and capabilities, much alone catch up in terms of the country's capacity to translate power resources into effective worldwide influence. While it's unlikely that China will ever become a superpower on par with the United States, a bipolar system requires that both major powers have significant global sway. In the next decades, China and the United States will diverge from the rest of the globe, bringing the international order back to a state of rough, or "loose," bipolarity.

There will be substantial and intriguing theoretical ramifications of the fact that U.S.-China bipolarity will be different from U.S.-Soviet bipolarity during the Cold War. Bipolarity discussions have been extrapolated from the Cold War era, a time when global competitiveness and ideological animosity between the superpowers essentially hindered the cooperative pursuit of shared duties or undertakings. The present research, however, overlooks the fact that bipolarity might be linked to a broader set of relationships between the two superpowers. Patterns of collaboration and rivalry between the two dominating states are both indicative of bipolarity. Their connection is shaped not just by the framework of the international system, but also by exogenous factors like their degree of economic interdependence and the political convictions of their respective governments at home. As World War II ended, ties between the United States and the Soviet Union were tense. Thus, the United States attempted to limit the Soviet Union's participation in international organizations and its access to the global economy. In contrast, the United States actively pursued an alliance with China against the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, capitalizing on geopolitical and ideological tensions between the two communist superpowers. The United States, when China opened its economy in the late 1970s, intended to co-opt China rather than control or isolate it so that it would help shoulder the load of addressing global issues and become a "responsible partner" in international affairs. China now outperforms the Soviet Union in a variety of material asset and capability benchmarks, making it an attractive investment option. Whereas the Soviet Union's contribution of world GDP peaked at 14.3 percent in 1969, China now accounts for 15 percent. China has been gradually increasing its proportion of global military expenditures (including non-U.S. spending) during the last two decades, and it is currently the world's second-biggest spender behind the United States. Even China's nuclear arsenal has been updated, with numerous warheads being added to the DF-5, China's most powerful missile that is capable of striking the United States. In contrast to the United States, China's soft power is more effective than that of the Soviet Union was. Historical patterns are more informative than isolated data points. Due to its size and potential, China's ascent is very significant.

SECURITY COMPETITION IN NORTHEAST ASIA

There has been a lot of talk about a possible turning point in military history in the wake of the nuclear revolution, the end of the Cold War, the growth of ethnonational conflicts, and the expansion of global capitalism and democracy. Some predict an increase in low-intensity conflict and a "clash of civilizations," while others predict the "end of history" and the

eventual obsolescence of war, at least between big powers. There are fundamental assumptions and theoretical assertions supporting each of these theories on war's origins. The purpose of this review is to evaluate current theories and methods for studying war and its causes. Over twenty years ago, two prominent experts in the field of international relations contended, from contrasting viewpoints, that our systematic understanding of international warfare had made little forward since Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War. The field of international relations had made great strides since its birth at the close of World War II as an independent subject of study, making such perspective somewhat exaggerated at the time and absolutely erroneous now. We have a more overtly theoretical orientation, are more methodologically self-conscious in our use of qualitative techniques, and pay more attention to the fit between theory and study design. Despite this, there are huge disagreements among experts, a lack of lawlike propositions, and a lack of ability to make predictions. There is no agreement on the nature and origins of war, the best approaches to identifying and verifying those causes, the broader theories of international relations and human behavior to which a theory of war might be subsumed, the criteria that should be used to evaluate competing theories, or even the possibility of generalizing about something as nuanced and situationally dependent as war. The job of summarizing the study of war is made more difficult by the wide variety of theoretical, methodological, and epistemological approaches that have been taken. My last evaluation has covered a lot of ground, so I'll just talk about the most important things to happen in the past decade here.

The Security Dilemma

The "security challenge" is a key idea in almost all realism. Mearsheimer approvesly paraphrases John Herz's first formulation of the problem: "In an effort to feel safe from... assault, [states] are compelled to amass ever-increasing amounts of strength in order to shield themselves from the influence of other nations' military might. It makes everyone else nervous and forces them to be ready for the worst. As a result, no one unit can ever feel completely safe, and a never-ending cycle of fear, paranoia, and power struggles begins " (p. 36).

For Mearsheimer, this is "a synoptic formulation of aggressive realism." There is some truth to this, but only in a narrow sense: As with the security conundrum, the major powers in offensive realism are mainly concerned with security, and their security actions do harm others, prompting them to take countermeasures. But now the parallels start to break out. Most explanations of the security dilemma (Herz's included) highlight how governments that just desire to maintain the status quo may engage in power and security rivalry with one another. No one is genuinely hostile, but since no one knows what the others are thinking, they all look hostile because they have to take precautions against being hurt. However, Mearsheimer's universe does not have any powers that maintain the current order. Each major power is constantly revising history and is "ready for attack" (p. 3). While Mearsheimer concedes that states may not have perfect knowledge of one another's motivations, he argues that nations "are likely to perceive their own objectives at play in the conduct of other states" (p. 35). It's impossible to imagine a "dilemma" if everyone is a revisionist and assumes (right) that everyone other is as well. The security measures taken by each major power pose genuine, not imaginary, dangers to the others. The necessity to protect against unknown dangers hence creates no "unnecessary" rivalry.

The Causes of War

When analyzing the root causes of conflict, Mearsheimer applies all three of his structural models. Balanced multipolarity falls between the extremes of bipolarity and multipolarity that is prone to conflict and war. Because of (1) more possible conflict dyads, (2) more likely power imbalances, including two nations ganging up on one, and (3) more possibility for mistake, the two multipolar systems are more unstable (defining instability as proneness to war) than bipolar ones. This kind of thinking is consistent with those of realists such as Waltz. But it's a novel argument of Mearsheimer's that an imbalanced multipolar system is the most unstable. Having a potential hegemon is a hallmark of an imbalanced multipolar system. Given its capabilities, such a state would want regional hegemony and strive for it "since hegemony is the ultimate kind of security" (p. 345). Because of this anxiety, other governments are less likely to take risks to redress the situation. But the would-be hegemon will see this as "encirclement," and it may take more measures to increase its security, setting up a cycle of mutual dread (p. 345) that is quite likely to result in war.

CONCLUSION

The relentless emphasis on power-security rivalry among big powers that Mearsheimer maintains implies that many other facets of international politics that are often regarded crucial are either given short shrift or neglected completely. In contrast, the fight for dominance is emphasized in a way that goes much beyond what might be called "realistic." When two powers share power equally, the system is said to be bipolar. The rise of international organizations (like the United Nations) that compete with and frequently restrain the authority of nations is another example of how multipolarity is represented today. The structure and character of international politics will be profoundly affected by a system defined by competition between the United States and China. These aftereffects and ramifications will be different from those of the Cold War era, when the United States and the Soviet Union maintained separate political spheres. There are overarching tendencies in the study of war's causes that cut across

theoretical paradigms, some of which are in reaction to real-world developments and others of which are the result of independent changes in intellectual paradigms. One is a shift away from a traditional concentration on major powers and toward smaller state conflicts, such as civil wars and ethnonational conflicts.

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