K. N. WALTZ "Theory of international politics" (1979). "Laws establish relations between variables, variables being concepts that can take different values. If a, then b, where a stands for one or more independent varaibales and b stands for the dependent variable: In form, this is the statement of a law. IF the relation betwen and b is invariant, the law would read liek this: If a, then b with probability x. A law is based on not simply on a relation that has been found, btut on one that has been found repeatdly. " "by defnition, theories are collections or sets of laws pertaning to a particular behaviour or phenonomenon. [...] Theories are, then, more complex than laws, but only quantitatively so. Between laws and theories no differenes of kind appears". "A theory is born in conjecture and is viable if the conjecture is confirmeD".

Waltz's chapter 6 of particular interest to those considering the impact which small powers have on the international stage. "The state among states, it is often said, conducts its affairs in the brooding shadow of violence. Because some states may at any time use fore, al lstates must be prepared to do so - or live at the mercy of their militar ymore vigorous neighbors. Amonst states, teh state of nature is a state of war. This is meant not in the sense that war constantly occurs but in the sense that, with each stat deciding for itself whether or not ot use forces ,war may at any time break out. Whether in the family, the community, or the world at large, ocntact without at least the occasional conflict is conconveivable; and the hope that in the absence of an agent to manage or manipulate conflicting partiels the use of fore wil lalways be avoided cannot be realistically entertained. Among men as among states, anarcy, or the absence of government, is associated with the occurrence of violence." Waltz speaks of the "division of labour" among states. "integration draws the parts of a nation closely together. Interdependence among nations leaves them loosely connected. Although hte integration of nations is often talked about, it seldom takes place. Nations could mutually enrich themselves by further dividing not just hte labour but that goes into the production of goods nut also some ofhte other tasks they perofrm, such as political management and military defense [...] In a self-help system each of the units spends a portio nof its effort, not in forwarding its own good, but in providing the means of protecting itself against others. Specialisation in a system of divided labour works to everyone's advantage, though not equally so. Inequality in the expected distribution of increased product works strongly against extension of the division of labour internationally. When face with the possiblity of cooperating for mutual gain, states that feel insecure must ask how the gain will be divided. [..] In any self-help system, units worry about their survival, and the worry conditoins their behaviour. Oligopolistic markets limit the cooperation of firms in much te way that international-political structures limit the copperation of states. Witin the rules laid down by governments, whether firms survive and propser depends on their own efforts. Firms need not protect themselves physically agianst assaults from other firms. They are free t oconcentrate on their economic interests. As economic entities, however, they live in a self-help world. All want to increase profits. If they run undue risks in the effort t odo so, they must expect to suffer the consequences.""

"The political significance of interdependence varies depending on whether a realm is organiszed , with relations of athority specified ad establishe,d or emains formally unorganized. Insofar as a realm is formally organized, its units are free to specialize, to pursue their own interests without concern for developing the means of maintaining their identiy and preserving their security in th presence of others. They are free to specialisze because htey have no reason to fear the increased interdependence that goes with specialization. If those wh ospecialze most benefit most, then competition in specializatoin ensues. "

More Waltz

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deserves to be. The most relevant problem is one of our own making and is largely attributable to the leading manner in which strategy is conceptualized. Strategy is as indeed it must be, of tacticsand sometimes of operations. There is no mystical or magical ingredient that can be added to military combat for the purpose of creating strategic effect reliably. Strategy, meaning the decisions made or left unmade, alwa have consequences, but that is not necessarily to lay claim to intelligent purpose.

It is the responsibility of the commanding general to ensure that the chosen strateg both makes political sense and is militarily feasible at tolerable cost. The primary subordinate generals must be to organize and command the timely and appropriate necessities of combat for the purposes established by the most senior level of milit command in their negotiation with civilian political authority.

The defining explanation of the purpose in exercising military power, both in threat and in action, is clear beyond reasonable doubt as to the subordination of military to the purpose which can only be provided by local, legitimate political process. So can be the variety of forms that provide authority regarded locally as legitimate th theory of strategy must be relaxed about the choices exercised by different polities whole range of situations regarding national security.5 The theory of strategy is no particularly interested in the choices made between one or another (rival) model of civilmilitary relations, because a fundamental rule should govern in all political contexts; specifically, the armed forces of states in practice should be as indiffer feasible with respect to competing domestic parties and interests.

Principle 2 bears upon a set of challenges that most soldiers are obliged neither to nor even to attempt to understand. As more and more conflicts in the twenty-first ce entail connections between soldiers and local civilian societies, the relationship b military power and political authority has become ever more troubling and troublesom In this new era of digitized social media, clear distinctions between combatants and combatants are readily confused and confounded by part-time or occasional armed combatants. When hostilities almost regularly include civil conflict among a kaleido of armed and angry participants, the world for the professional soldier has signific changed. State-to-state conflict has assuredly not retired, but the strategic experi large areas of what we have long called the Middle East makes a mockery of much Western expertise,

5 The theory of strategy is indifferent to the character of political authority, ins needs to be an undoubted legitimating body. This is a necessity for the authority of command.

106 CHAPTER 6

The relative strength of firms rests upon the fact that each firm is constrained to strike a balance between maximising its own profits and minimising the danger of retaliation. Any firm that accepts a smaller profit in the short run may thereby

gain a stronger position in the long run, since rivals might be forced to concede part of the market. The temptation for larger profits will always be present, but if one firm seeks to break out, it risks sparking a price war from which all participants would suffer. Therefore, each must resist accepting small gains at the expense of the wider stability.

It is, Fellner insists, the essence of oligopoly that a firm must always take into account the possible reaction of its rivals (p. 199). The struggle for markets cannot be separated from the expectation of retaliation. Cooperation is therefore not a matter of benevolence, but of hard calculation.

Why not then assume that cooperation will always fail? Because the shadow of the future looms over the calculations of firms. They recognise that to pursue short-term advantage may imperil long-term survival. In the words of Fellner, the stability of oligopoly depends upon the tacit agreement not to seek small advantages which would provoke retaliation (pp. 132, 21718).

This reasoning extends to states as well as to firms. Nations, like oligopolistic companies, are concerned not merely with absolute advantage but with relative advantage. A state may forgo possible short-term gains if they threaten to divide it from its partners or expose it to countermeasures. The structure of international politics thus resembles that of the market in one key respect: actors must weigh not only their own choices, but the probable responses of others.

107 CHAPTER 6

The system of self-help means that each state must take care of itself, since no other authority exists to guarantee its security. Cooperation is possible, but it is fragile and always shadowed by the incentive to defect. The imperative is survival, and so states act on the assumption that others may not honour their commitments. In the absence of a higher authority, international politics is conditioned by this structural restraint.

States do not act in isolation from one another, but they cannot rely upon others to safeguard their interests. Each must consider how its actions will be interpreted by others, and what responses they may provoke. Even well-intentioned policies may be misread, and in a system where security is scarce, such misinterpretations can be fatal.

This is the logic of self-help: trust is always conditional, prudence always required. States may develop a good sense of the structure of international politics, but they cannot guarantee that their strategies will achieve their intende ends. Often, they fail.

Examples abound: alliances formed to deter aggression can instead provoke it; economic interdependence can generate friction rather than harmony; and arms buildups meant to ensure security can trigger spirals of insecurity. Such outcomes do not necessarily reflect poor leadership or mistaken calculations,

but the constraints of a self-help system.

108 CHAPTER 6

The balance of power is therefore not an occasional policy but a permanent condition of the international system. States are compelled to pay attention to relative gains, because to ignore them would be to risk subordination or extinction. Even when cooperation occurs, it is hedged by calculations about how benefits are distributed and what new vulnerabilities may arise.

In this sense, the structure of international politics is analogous to a market in which firms compete not only for profit but also for survival. Just as no firm can ignore its competitors, no state can ignore the power of others. The result is a relentless logic of competition, tempered only by prudence and the occasional alignment of interests.

The consequences are paradoxical. States may seek peace, but in pursuing their own security they often create insecurity for others. This is the so-called security dilemma: measures taken by one state to enhance its securitymilitary expansion, alliances, or new technologiesare interpreted by others as threats, prompting countermeasures. What begins as a defensive act may therefore spiral into mutual suspicion and arms races.

The security dilemma illustrates the tragedy of international politics. Even if all states prefer peace, the absence of a central authority forces them to act as if war were always possible. The system rewards caution and vigilance, but these very qualities sustain the cycle of mistrust.

109 CHAPTER 6

The condition of anarchy does not mean constant war, but it does mean that the possibility of conflict is ever present. States cannot be certain of the intentions of others, and so they must prepare for the worst even while hoping for the best. The result is a world in which competition is continuous, but war is intermittent.

This perspective helps explain why international institutions, though useful, are limited in their effect. They cannot eliminate the security dilemma because they do not alter the fundamental condition of anarchy. Agreements may regulate behaviour, but they cannot abolish the fear that others will defect if circumstances change. International law may codify norms, but it lacks the enforcement power to guarantee compliance.

For this reason, states remain primarily concerned with capabilities, not promises. What matters is not what others say they will do, but what they can do. Power, not words, is the ultimate currency. Diplomacy is important, but its effectiveness depends on the shadow of coercive force behind it.

This is why even cooperation often reflects calculations of relative power.

States join alliances not out of altruism but because they believe such alignments will enhance their security. When conditions change, so too do alliances, sometimes collapsing with little warning. The logic of anarchy ensures that todays partner can be tomorrows rival.

110 CHAPTER 6

The distribution of capabilities among states is therefore the key variable in international politics. When power is concentrated, strong states dominate and weaker states must adapt. When power is more evenly spread, states have greater room for manoeuvre, but they also face the constant risk of shifts in the balance that can alter their security overnight.

From this logic follows the enduring importance of polarity. A multipolar system, with several great powers, fosters shifting alliances and instability, as states continually adjust to perceived threats. A bipolar system, such as the Cold War order, can generate stability through the clarity of rivalry between two dominant actors. A unipolar system, by contrast, places one state in a position of primacy, but such dominance is always contested and rarely permanent.

The character of the system, then, is not set by the intentions of leaders but by the structure of power. States may seek to defy this logic, but the costs are often prohibitive. History is littered with examples of those who ignored the distribution of power and paid the price.

The realist claim, starkly stated, is that the system compels states to act in certain ways regardless of their preferences. It is not human nature, or the foibles of particular rulers, but the anarchic structure and the distribution of capabilities that explain the broad patterns of world politics.

111 CHAPTER 6

This structural argument does not deny the importance of human agency, but it places clear limits upon it. Leaders may choose among options, but the menu is constrained by the distribution of power and the condition of anarchy. States that ignore these constraints may enjoy temporary success, but they are unlikely to prosper in the long run.

The logic can be illustrated by balance-of-power politics. States do not need to be told to balance; the pressures of the system push them to do so. If one state becomes too strong, others will form coalitions to counter it. This may not happen immediately or in perfect symmetry, but over time balances tend to emerge. Failure to balance usually carries severe consequences, as weaker states are absorbed or dominated.

This process operates whether or not leaders consciously intend it. Balance-of-power politics is not a deliberate choice but a systemic tendency. That is why it recurs across history in so many different cultural and political

contexts. From ancient Greece to modern Europe, the logic remains recognisable.

At the same time, balance of power is not a guarantee of peace. It may deter aggression, but it can also provoke wars as states seek to adjust balances in their favour. The pattern is familiar: competition, alignment, conflict, and realignment. The system endures, but the human costs can be immense.

112 CHAPTER 6

It follows that stability and peace are at best temporary achievements in an anarchic system. Even when balances appear firm, they are subject to erosion by shifts in power, technology, or alliances. What seems durable today may collapse tomorrow. The quest for permanent security is therefore elusive.

This does not mean that states are powerless. Wise statesmen can manage alliances carefully, avoid unnecessary provocations, and seek to maintain a favourable balance. Institutions and norms can help to moderate behaviour, providing information and reducing uncertainty. But none of these devices can remove the underlying condition of self-help.

The lesson is sobering. International politics is not a realm where harmony naturally arises from goodwill. It is a competitive domain where vigilance is always necessary and where even peace must be understood as provisional. Success is measured not in absolute safety but in relative security, not in permanent solutions but in temporary arrangements that stave off danger.

The structure of the system does not change easily. While domestic politics can transform rapidly with revolutions or reforms, the international order alters only when the distribution of power is fundamentally shifted. Until then, anarchy and the balance of power remain the defining features of world affairs.

113 CHAPTER 6

This perspective helps explain why wars are both recurrent and difficult to prevent. Because states cannot be certain of each others intentions, and because the system rewards vigilance, they often prepare for worst-case scenarios. Such preparations, however, may themselves be perceived as threatening, leading to spirals of suspicion and hostility.

Deterrence can reduce the likelihood of war, but it cannot eliminate it. For deterrence to work, threats must be credible, and credibility depends upon the willingness and ability to use force. States therefore devote immense resources to military capabilities, not only for defence but also to signal resolve. Yet the very act of building strength can trigger countermeasures by others.

Arms races are a natural consequence of this dynamic. Each state may claim that its buildup is defensive, but in the eyes of rivals it appears offensive. The outcome is often a cycle of competition that neither side desires yet both feel compelled to sustain. History shows that such races can make crises more

dangerous, as mobilisation timetables shorten and the temptation to strike first grows stronger.

The tragedy of international politics is that rational actions by individual states can produce irrational outcomes for the system as a whole. Fear and uncertainty drive behaviour that, while prudent in isolation, can be collectively destabilising.

114 CHAPTER 6

The systemic constraints of anarchy do not render states powerless, but they sharply circumscribe the possibilities of international politics. Within these limits, wise leadership can still matter greatly. States that recognise the logic of the system may navigate it more skilfully, avoiding reckless ambitions and managing power with prudence.

But leaders who ignore the realities of anarchy court disaster. The history of great powers is filled with examples of overextension, miscalculation, and hubris. Those who fail to respect the balance of power often find themselves punished by it. In this sense, the structure of the system educates through harsh lessons.

For students of international relations, the point is clear. Theories that emphasise human goodwill or the harmony of interests overlook the enduring facts of anarchy and competition. Realism insists that these facts cannot be wished away. The structure of the system compels states to act in certain ways, and while strategies may vary, the underlying logic persists.

The conclusion, then, is not that conflict is inevitable, but that it is always possible. States may enjoy periods of peace, but they cannot escape the pressures of self-help and balance. International politics remains, in the final analysis, a tragic arena where the search for security continually generates the possibility of war.

116 CHAPTER 6

...exercise of sovereignty but only in ways strongly conditioned by the anarchy of the larger system. The anarchy of that order strongly affects the likelihood of cooperation, the extent of arms agreements, and the jurisdiction of international organizations.

But what about borderline cases, societies that are neither clearly anarchic nor clearly hierarchic? Do they not represent a third type? To say that there are borderline cases is not to say that at the border a third type of system appears. All categories have borders, and if we have any categories at all, we have border cases. Clarity of concepts does not eliminate difficulties of classification. Was China from the 1920s to the 1940s a hierarchical or an anarchic realm? Nominally a nation, China looked more like a number of separate states existing alongside one another. Mao Tse-tung in 1930, like Bolshevik leaders earlier, thought that

a revolutionary spark would start a prairie fire. Revolutionary flames would spread across China, if not throughout the world. Because the interdependence of Chinas provinces, like the interdependence of nations, was insufficiently close, the flames failed to spread. So nearly autonomous were Chinas provinces that the effects of war in one part of the country were only weakly registered in other parts Battles in the Hunan hills, far from sparking a national revolution, were hardly noticed in neighbouring provinces. The interaction of largely self-sufficient provinces was slight and sporadic. Dependence on one another economically nor on one anothers centers politically, they were not subject to the close interdependence characteristic of organized and integrated polities.

As a practical matter, observers may disagree in their answers to such questions as just when did China break down into anarchy, or whether the countries of Western Europe are slowly becoming one state or stubbornly remaining nine. The point of theoretical importance is that our expectations about the fate of those areas differ widely depending on which answer to the structural question becomes the right one. Structures defined according to two distinct ordering principles help to explain important aspects of social and political behavior. That is shown in various ways in the following pages. This section has explained why two, and only two, types of structure are needed to cover societies of all sorts.

II

How can a theory of international politics be constructed? Just as any theory must be. As Chapters 1 and 4 explain, first, one must conceive of international politics as a bounded realm or domain; second, one must discover some law-like regularities within it; and third, one must develop a way of explaining the observed regularities. The first of these was accomplished in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 so far has shown how political structures account for some recurrent aspects of...

ARGUMENT 33

Caesar, whose battlefield command performance was undoubtedly exceptionally able; it was also exceptionally bloody, even for the period. A little reflection, however, triggers the thought that perfection in combat generalship is only of strictly limited interest. What matters for a general theory of strategy is a robust grasp of how and why good strategy works. The theory here accepts that generals, in company with their political masters, indeed often because of them, are of variable quality. It accepts, as it must, the fact of considerable human differences between individuals and cultures, as well as situations. Today, for example, there is need for very senior soldiers whose career paths have encompassed the management of violence and the exceedingly small scale typical of counter-terrorism, as well as potential nuclear threat or even (limited) use.

The requirements of superior senior generalship today are almost beyond the reach of mere mortals. The theory of strategy needs to express understanding of the need for political and military leaders to be ready enough

to face exceptional circumstances. Obviously, a theory of strategy, as with any general theory, has to be careful not to imperil its conceptual integrity by conceding undue weight to events that plainly ought not to occur if the theory is sound. Performance of the strategy function, at all times and in all places, begs to attract identification of exceptions to normal behaviour.

Exceptions, provided they truly are such, do not shake confidence in strategys general theory. One must allow for occasionally erratic behaviour, whether or not it promotes positive consequences (for whom, one may ask?). It is important to remember that because the future is by definition always the domain of strategy, it is highly probable that the strategic consequences of much tactical and operational action will remain obscure even on a lengthy timeline. This can prove distinctly unhelpful to political leaders in need of apparent evidence of the gaining of some total advantage. Also, it will be the case that when an erratic military genius has a poor week, month, or even year, the general who remains will just be erratic. Long odds can win, but that is not a prudent way to bet.

As a rule for general theory, exceptions are tolerable and should be tolerated provided they do not menace the sense of the intention in the relevant principle. An exception only on an occasional Friday, for example, should be tolerable for a well enough crafted theory, whereas an exception that occurs every week is a phenomenon that demands either wholesale or partial theoretical revision.

34 THEORY OF STRATEGY

the futureis too great to be reduced meaningfully.16 The range of human military experience requiring capture by general theory is seriously forbidding. Such a sentiment of conclusive dismay at the size of the challenge is not difficult to comprehend. However, there is less to hinder us than might be anticipated by a swift inspection of potential evidence. Probably the single most useful navigation aid for the researcher and theorist is the elementary conceptual triad comprising Ends, Ways, and Means. When the ideas of Assumptions and Consequences are added to the core three we have the rather bare basis of a usable method for exploring who did what; why they probably did it; how they did it; with what it was done (or at least attempted); what the actors believed that they knew at the time; and what the consequences of decisions to act, or to refrain from acting, probably were. We need not be unduly troubled by the unknown and possibly unknowable detail about motives in ancient, medieval, and much more recent history, because understanding with the general theory of strategy is not likely to depend upon an evidential base steered in practice by matters of detail that escape conceptual attention. For example, the theory both can and does notice explicitly the rare, but real fact of exceptional battlefield leadership, known typically as generalship. As a consequence, the extraordinary performance of armies led by such men as Julius Caesar, the Duke of Marlborough, and Napoleon Bonaparte may be misassessed; each of the three, very occasionally, led from the front in

battle. The general theory of strategy argues that the quality of generalship is always likely to matter, occasionally profoundly, but hardly ever is it able to dominate reliably what otherwise could be anticipated from an understanding of comparable ways and means. It is undoubtedly attractive to enjoy the services of a saviour general, as the recent term, though not especially recent phenomenon, has it, but it is yet more attractive to avoid the necessity for such good fortune or genius.17

The general theory of strategy is designed to help educate leaders and their apprentices, especially military ones, by helping them understand strategic thought and the meaning of military action. There is no presumption here that most senior officers are capable of reasoning strategically, especially in a context of warfare that may well be dominated by operational or even tactical issues that should be managed by subordinates. If there is an assumption behind this text it is the belief that most general officers are competent, but probably no better than that. There is not and there should not be a field marshals baton in every soldiers pack. Nonetheless, every officer should be